FARE WELL, ILLYRIA

David Binder

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FARE WELL

FOREWORD

In the Serbian language the common expression for "Goodbye" is "Srećan put," literally, "Have a good road." The parallel in Croatian is "Sretan put;" in Slovenian, "Srecno pot;" in Bulgarian, "Na dobar pat;" in Romanian, "Drum bun;" in Albanian, "Rrugem bar."

The English equivalent is the original "Fare well."

For anyone traveling in the Balkan hinterlands, a send-off wish of "fare well" or a "good road" makes very good sense. Until recently even the thoroughfares were mostly back roads in the sense of having been constructed far back in time. You might travel far to find deeper ruts, more boulders strewn, bridges washed out, mud glazes, almost impassable herds of sheep, stalled tractors, occasional highwaymen. Was it always like that?

The 267 miles of the Via Egnatia completed about 130 BC under Gaius Egnatius the proconsul of Macedonia to link the ports of Thessaloniki on the Aegean with Durres on the Adriatic was "easily traversed by chariot" according to Strabo. Having driven across many potholes and washout gashes of the Egnatia route up the Shkumbin River valley in central Albania in 1991 in a four-cylinder chariot, I surmised that it was probably in better shape in its Roman days. I wished myself "Rrugem bar!" It was not the first time in the region that I made that wish in one language or another. Hence the "Fare Well" of the title.

Surely the most powerful curse placed on Southeastern Europe was branding it with the name, "Balkans." In a short time it became a pejorative, spawning such damning expressions as "balkanization." Or, simply "Balkans!" as in a mocking phrase in Vienna, "the Balkans begins at the Northwest Railroad Station!"

The designation was conceived by Johann August Zeune, a neophyte German scholar, in his 1808 geography, which included the southeastern portion of the continent. At the time, the area was generally known as "Turkish Europe," thereby including it at least in Europe, which the new name did not. The area was then possibly as little known in northern Europe as America's western wilderness. Back in the twelfth century, Sava, the most venerated saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church had written Ireneus, a fellow churchman, his perception: "The East thought that we were West, while the West considered us to be East. Some of us misunderstood our place in the clash of currents, so they cried that we belonged to neither side, and others that we belong exclusively to one

side or the other. But I tell you, Ireneus, we are doomed by fate to be the East in the West and the West in the East." So the region was then and so it is today.

Zeune, doubtless innocent but also vastly presumptuous, exercised the power conferred by God upon Adam, by bestowing the name "Balkan Halbeiland" upon Europe's gnarled, back leg and many-toed foot — "half island" being the older way of saying "peninsula." He was thirty years old when he coined the term, but had not traveled to the land in question then or later.

Presumably he drew on scattered topographic references in older texts. The first usage of "Balkan" appears to have been that of Philippus Calimachus, a fifteenth century Italian writer, in a memorandum to the Pope about a a mountain range. German and French authors in the sixteenth and centuries subsequently adopted this term. Zeune simply copied it for this, his first publication: "Gea, Attempt at a Scientific Description of the Earth." (Ah, the magic of "scientific"!)

The German hypothesized that a modest strip of low-lying mountains in central Bulgaria — 800 miles southeast of Berlin — stretched up the entire southeastern European peninsula. Adding confusion, he applied "Balkan," the Turkish word for a forested mountain, to his imagined range. He alluded to Stara Planina (old mountains), known in classical times as Haemus. It is 375 miles long, 25 miles wide and its peaks are much lower those of the more conspicuous mountain chains of the peninsula, the Dinaric range, the Pindus and the Julian Alps.

By choosing what he supposed was the most prominent topographical feature to designate the region — then and later a convention among geographers — Zeune made his case. Probably for lack of competition "Balkan" began to take hold. What had hitherto been commonly called "The Near East" or "Turkish Europe" was fated to a non-European otherness.

The timing of the baptism was everything.

In 1804, amid the forested hills of Šumadija, the Serbs rose up in their first revolt against the Ottoman Turks. In 1809 Napoleon's victories over the Austrians forced their cession of parts of Carinthia and Croatia to his empire. Together with Istria and Dalmatia they were attached to France, along with Ragusa-Dubrovnik, which had long been an independent city-state republic. In 1821 the Greeks began their war of liberation. Suddenly a region largely under Turkish rule that had been remote from the consciousness of most northern and western Europeans, erupted. With admirable concision the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1926 edition) noted in its article on the Balkan Peninsula: "As the Turkish empire contracted, new names appeared on the map. The growth of the new states was accompanied by much turmoil, which had reflex effects outside the limits of the peninsula…The

essential point is it drew general attention to the region. It became increasingly clear that all the older European states, if in varying degrees, were interested in the delimiting of boundaries within it."

A glittering moment for a geographer.

Adding to his authority, Zeune was appointed to a professorship at the newly established University of Berlin. It also helped that by the beginning of the nineteenth century Germans had acquired international repute in the sciences, including the relatively new discipline of geography. (Oddly, Germans, if not Zeune himself, could have known quite a bit about Southeastern Europe from their own history. One thousand years earlier Karl der Grosse — Charlemagne — ruled a Frankish empire that included Slovenia, Croatia and part of Bosnia.)

The Zeune term, "Balkan Halbeiland" was apparently accepted by Carl Ritter, his successor at the Berlin university, and by their distinguished associate, Alexander von Humboldt. As early as 1854 Karl Marx, one of Ritter's students, used "Balkans" as a geographic term in dispatches from London to the *New York Daily Tribune*.

Meanwhile, steam trains, steam ships and the telegraph were opening all but the most inaccessible mountains and valleys of Europe's Wild East. Potentates in Moscow and Vienna cast covetous eyes across the crumbling Ottoman frontiers — not to mention rulers in London and Paris.

Viewing the turmoil in Bosnia as well as in Bulgaria in 1876, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck declared in the German Reichstag that Germany had "no interests in the Balkans that were worth the healthy bones of a Pomeranian musketeer." By 1890 the term "Balkan powder keg" was in common usage. But Bismarcks's successors did not heed his scorn. Instead they plunged the German people deep into the Balkans in the two world wars and tens of thousands of German soldiers left their bones there.

Few of the 70 million or so inhabitants of the Balkans want to be identified with that name — chosen for them, not by them. To be sure scattered around there were streets, hotels, restaurants, tourist agencies, even an airline called "Balkan." But these constituted more a polite bow to alien romanticists, adventurers and scheming imperialists than a personal commitment.

Perhaps it was in part to combat the negative associations of "Balkans" that in 1934 the more or less friendly governments of Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia formed a Council of Balkan Entente. That effort foundered under the pressure of stronger hostile powers. After World War II, efforts were made again to revive regional cooperation under the designation "Balkan" — the first conceived in 1946 by Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito as a means of extending his sway to Bulgaria and beyond. The latest was a foreign ministers conference in Tirana in 1990, swiftly consigned to

oblivion by the outbreak of civil wars across Yugoslavia. Not that federation was a bad idea at all, given the shared history, geography and even economic interests of the region's components. Indeed it may someday be achieved at various levels under the umbrella of the European Union.

Yet for the rest of the world "Balkan" remains a stigma synonymous with feuds, fragmentation, fighting and, finally, futility.

Maria Todorova, the Bulgarian scholar, has finely drawn the evolution of (largely northern European) political thinking about the region in her "Imagining the Balkans" (1997). Vesna Goldsworthy, born in Yugoslavia and now teaching in England, has provided the literary background of that thinking in her brilliant "Inventing Ruritania" (1997). Ms. Goldsworthy observed that the Balkans were "insufficiently oriental to be considered exotic, and yet always viewed as not-quite European," and thus became "a blank canvas upon which Europe's political unconscious plays out its taboos and hidden anxieties."

With a bow to these women I have foregone the term "Balkan" in the title (but perforce will return to it in the text). Rather, I offer a less burdened geographic term, Illyria, from the Roman era, even though geographically it represented but a part of the peninsula. The name was drawn from a powerful tribe that successfully resisted Roman incursions for six decades until 168 BC. In addition to Illyria, the peninsula contained the Roman provinces of Thrace, Dacia, Moesia, Pannonia, Macedonia and Graecia. Thrace included northern Greece, southern Bulgaria and the European part of Turkey. Dacia was largely today's Romania. Graecia was of course the Greece of the Roman Empire.

More than other Balkan toponyms, I think, Illyria has resonated through European history and literature. The Roman province of Illyricum, encompassed a large chunk of what became Yugoslavia. Shakespeare chose it as the almost mythical setting of *Twelfth Night*. Napoleon named his territorial conquests in the region the Illyrian Provinces. In the 1830s, Croatian intellectuals, restive under Hungarian rule, started a nationalist organization they camouflaged with the designation "Illyrian Movement" with the purported aim of establishing a kingdom. (They gained enough support to cause their Hapsburg rulers to ban the word "Illyrian" from political discourse in 1843 — but, curiously, to permit the use of "Croatian," which was the primary aim of the nationalists.) We will see, too, that many Albanians see the Illyrians as their direct ancestors.

Despite their differences, some profound, the peoples of Southeastern Europe share common characteristics and much common history, as Arshi Pipa, the eminent Albanian scholar, pointed out in 1984: "Ethnic and cultural differences exist; they cannot be denied. But there exists something

else, too, which brings these peoples together: a common layer of culture, the sediment of first Byzantine and then Turkish domination. And underneath that layer lies the abjection of whole populations who suffered under them." Four decades earlier in his memoir *The Long Balkan Night*, the intrepid young American journalist Leigh White had observed in a similar vein: "The Balkans have always been a crossroads of the world, a fulcrum on which world power seesaws, a buffer between East and West. It is here that Europe merges into Africa and Asia, that the twentieth century joins the Middle Ages, that feudalism meets industrialism, and tyranny meets democracy. The result for more than a century, has been chronic instability, both economic and political, and a type of autocratic state that breeds violence, corruption, assassination, and abortive revolution."

It is a region where people were used to being subjects, but hardly ever citizens.

Among the other shared experiences were varying degrees of poverty, a condition that prompted Dr. Ioan Talpes, a Romanian police official, to observe to me one day, "People with nothing still have a past, and the less people have the more past they have." This was a fitting homegrown counterpart to Winston Churchill's "the Balkan region has a tendency to produce more history than it can consume."

Beyond that common history, however involuntary, there were the recent intoxications of nationalism. One must keep in mind that until the early twentieth century, many if not most of the peoples of the Balkans were identified not by their language or other signs of ethnicity, but by their religion — the custom of the Ottoman empire. In the absence of central organizing forces, the strongest attachments were local — tribal at best. As Tatomir Vukanović, a Serbian ethnologist whom I got to know in Kosovo in the 1960s, explained when he was eighty, "I do not believe there are such things as nations. I believe there are only clans and tribes. Nations are artificial creations."

In the middle of the Cold War, the Balkans was not just the strange "other" it represented throughout the Ottoman period but also largely "enemy territory." Until the mid-sixties most official American diplomatic missions in the region were merely legations, not full-fledged embassies…in Albania there was no U.S. mission at all.

In the years previous to my assignment, American press coverage of the region was devoted mostly to diplomatic chess moves. Dragan Rančić of *Borba* (and later of *Politika*) complimented me one day, saying: "You were the first correspondent to write about us as people not just as political chess pieces.," He and other colleagues helped me enormously to grasp the subtleties of our surroundings. Here I tip my hat to Cyrus L. Sulzberger, a distinguished predecessor who traveled the

Balkan roads thirty years before me — when they were even bumpier — and who wrote lovingly and incisively about the region and its peoples in his 1969 memoir, *A Long Row of Candles*.

In a spirit of light mockery I used to join Viktor Meier, a knowledgeable and supremely skeptical Swiss correspondent, in singing or humming national anthems of the region that were mostly composed in the nineteenth century. We had heard them all too often at airport ceremonies for foreign dignitaries. Many anthems were replaced after the fall of the Communist dictators, but Europeans have long had the custom of changing anthems. Patriotic songs were the yeast of nationalism, which had come to the region much later than in northern Europe. In these latitudes nationalism was Janus-faced: a great blessing and a terrible curse. A blessing in fostering creative spirits in the arts, a curse in fostering the politics of fanaticism. Indeed, where creativity is concerned, the region has provided its share of genius to the world: Nikola Tesla, the Serbian inventor of radio and discoverer; John Atanasoff, the Bulgarian-American inventor of the digital computer; the sculptors Constantin Brancusi of Romania and Ivan Mestrovich of Croatia; writers like Ivo Andrić from Bosnia, Borislav Pekić from Serbia and Eugene Ionesco from Romania. To name only a few.

The passions of the civil wars that blazed across the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s have begun to recede, though the scars on the souls are still garishly present. To me the recent events of the Balkans seem so contrary to what is transpiring in much of the world: disintegration in place of integration; parochialism in place of globalization, new frontiers in place of dismantled borders; new visas and passports in place of a single European identity. To be counterintuitive, perhaps that is the nature of the Balkan beast.

Now it has again almost disappeared from the map of European and North American consciousness, becoming what the Serbs call *nićija zemlja* — a no man's land. A region from which hundreds of thousands of bright young people have been fleeing in search of a better or at least a safer life.

This provides an empty space in which to recount impressions of the peoples of the region from encounters over a period of four decades. Not as history, but rather as tales of how I found them to be and what I learned about them.

These are in the contemporary usage what may be called "back stories." In this case they are the scenes and events I experienced and the people I got close to while reporting events and their relevant settings during my forty-three months *en poste* in the Balkans and my days, weeks, and

months visiting this country and that in the next thirty-five years as a correspondent for *The New York Times*. I have left the Balkans but the Balkans never left me.

It is my belief and hope that to have a sense of what it was could help us to understand why it is the way it is and possibly even what it may become.

SERBIA

In May 1963, I journeyed to Belgrade, capital of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists. In the 1990s, I took the same route but now crossing the state frontiers of Slovenia and Croatia, which had never existed as durable states, to Serbia, once an ancient kingdom. The car was a Steyr Fiat, sort of an imperial automobile — at least for the Balkans. It was manufactured in Austria which had ruled Slovenia, Croatia and parts of Serbia — under license from Italy, which once ruled much of Dalmatia. Made probably in part by Yugoslav workers, *Gastarbeiter* as they were known in German lands — where their fathers and uncles had worked as slave laborers in World War II).

The sleek grey station wagon was all right on the smooth highways of northern Europe. On reaching the Balkans, it began to suffer breakdowns as had so many imperial machines in the millennial past. Not a region for finely tuned mechanisms. Better for a Russian or German tracked vehicle but nothing Italian. Aside from that, the Steyr was a bad-luck creature — a Balkans *New York Times* correspondent predecessor, M.S. Handler, had struck and killed a pedestrian in Vienna driving it. My goal was Belgrade, then the capital of the assertive, and determinedly original, nonaligned Yugoslavia — also the capital, much less emphatically, of Serbia. The façade of the main railway station was split down the middle, souvenir of an engineer whose brakes had failed when he reached the terminal. High above on a bluff towered the green and gold brick *Moskva*, the proud turn-of-the-century hotel whose backside had been sheared off by a bomb in the Luftwaffe attacks of April 1941. *Beograd*, the White City, loomed at all azimuths in almost every shade but white on its un-Roman seven hills, handsome in its undulations. In later years, I became fond of its old streets paved with huge *kaldrma* — paving stones from Turkish times — and its fine nineteenth century houses. Belgrade had been destroyed 52 times in its recorded history. Something scarcely to be grasped by an American who knew only that Chicago had been leveled once by fire, and San Francisco — once by earthquake. So what was I doing there? A question asked perhaps too infrequently in a time of swift and easy travel. Reared in the age of radio and comic books, I had an answer: The Yugoslavs alone among the peoples invaded by the German Nazis, Italian Fascists and their greedy allies, had risen up against these oppressors already in 1941 despite daunting odds of Panzer divisions, Stuka dive bombers, artillery, and ruthless reprisals by Wehrmacht and SS units. I read about them age 11 in November 1942 in *Real Life Comics*, in a strip about Colonel Draža Mihailović's Serbian Chetniks attacking Wehrmacht positions, sabotaging trains, blowing up

bridges. (No Tito was yet visible on the American screen.) Amplification of the comic strip came from war correspondents like Leland Stowe, visiting our newspaperman's house in a Chicago suburb — men who had been there. So I had a memory and thus a reason to become acquainted with those Yugoslavs. I am still at it.

At the *Moskva*, the front door fell off its hinges when I pulled it open on a May morning. I found myself bracing my legs to hold the heavy glass panel upright and keep it from shattering on Balkanska Street — a dance with a door. "*Nema problema*," said the blue-uniformed porter who rushed to relieve me, introducing a basic South Slavic attitude toward trouble, in a soothing voice: "No problem." The door had fallen off its hinges before, he explained. My Serbo-Croatian vocabulary consisted at this point of such absolute necessities as *sutra* (tomorrow), *ne može* (you may not) *nema* (we don't have it) *brzo* (quickly) and *polako* (slowly). In each there was strong emphasis on concepts of time or timeliness. Among South Slavs, they did not square with American expectations of promptitude. What bedazzled me was the self-assurance of the denial of service with a smile accompanying the message that what I sought or desired was either impossible to find or undeliverable. The *Moskva* was in addition a monument of sorts to those brief, intense and often mutually disappointing moments in the history of Serb-Russian relations. It had a Slavic soul, that is to say, occasionally unpredictable for non-Slavs. A light globe fell from a chandelier into my daughter's bowl of porridge. The bathroom sink collapsed. *Nema problema.* Mysterious forces were at work. I would need time to acquire the defensive strengths of superstition and suspicion. At every turn, I was encountering Serbs. But with the scales of propaganda over my eyes I was seeing them all as "Yugoslavs." That was the way Belgrade, and Washington, wanted it. Tito's people had forbidden the playing of the Drina March (*Marš na Drinu*) in cafes and restaurants — meaning that the stirring composition by Stanislav Binički celebrating the victory of 1914 at Cer, to the west of Belgrade, of the invading Austrians, was banned.

A few years later you could buy the *Marš* on 45 rpm discs — the opening bars are almost dirge-like, followed by a joyous *kolo*, the spirited Serbian circle dance with skirling fifes, a rattle of snare drum, cascading accordion chords and a thrumming bass fiddle. For years it made me want to put an arm around a partner's waist and wave a handkerchief with the other hand while making those short stabbing steps back and forth in a half circle of happy Serbs (and I was far from a good dancer.) Three decades later *Marš na Drinu* was debauched into an anthem of pseudo-Chetniks, bearded, clad in World War I uniform knockoffs, knives in their belts, strutting around the pedestrian zone of downtown Belgrade casting fierce glances while hawking tapes and CDs of that march and other

martial tunes beloved of feckless Serb warriors — the kind of mawkishness displayed by Irish-Americans, neo-Nazis and others susceptible to faux-nostalgia. How many dead Serbs must have rolled in their graves at this droning on Knez Mihajlova? But in the Belgrade of the 1960s, no maudlin sentiments were discernible. Instead *Majstor* Miša Stanojević, our handyman, a pre-war graduate of Belgrade University's engineering faculty, lowered his voice to a whisper when confiding his wartime activities with the (royalist) Chetniks. A gifted tinkerer, he constructed a powerful bomb (God, how the Serbs love explosions!) with which he blew up the Wehrmacht's bakery in Belgrade. His brown eyes glistened as he related the details in a whisper. After all, our second floor apartment in the posh Street of the *Proleterskih Brigada*, to which we had moved after six weeks in the *Moskva*, was probably infested with listening devices. Miša spoke with his index finger to his lips. Fifteen years later I called on a successor, Malcolm Browne, in his apartment on Palmotičeva Street and as I entered he raised his head and his voice to address a chandelier: "Yugoslavia is a police state! It's just as bad as the Soviet Union!" Astonished, I asked Browne why he did that. "I just want them to know what I think of them," he snapped. "But all they have to do to know what you think of them is to read your stories where you describe Belgrade as a city where 'sidewalks are slick with sputum," I replied. The US ambassador at the time, Laurence Silberman, told me he, too, yelled insults at his chandelier. The disease was catching. *Proleterskih Brigada*, named for the first *Partizan* unit of Tito's Popular Liberation Front led by Koča Popović, a gifted son of Belgrade, was something to conjure with. The gracious street with a row of sycamores in the median strip ran a mile and a half from the old royal palace to the Kaleničeva market, was originally called *Krunska* (Crown) and in the flush of Serbia's post-Communist era the old name was restored.

The first Serbs I got to know were not Communists, not by a long shot. There was *Majstor* Miša, the gaunt, snaggle-toothed bachelor whom we paid and often paid in kind — a frequent meal which he richly enjoyed or an electric tool from Trieste. He loved our children and when he came on his rounds to fix the water heater or the kitchen stove or to have lunch, our daughters, two of them born in Belgrade, squealed with joy at the top of the marble stairs: "*Majstor* Miša! *Majstor* Miša!" There was Mirjana Komarečki, born Petrović, my secretary-translator-office manager-telex operator and, eventually, my "Serbian sister," as I began to call her in the 1980s — long after I had left my post as Balkan bureau chief. She was a dignified woman who had already worked with a half dozen or so of idiosyncratic, egocentric predecessors (a description probably applicable to me as well). She gradually and gently introduced me to the idiosyncrasies and egocentricities of the Serbs: That they were the first of the South Slav peoples to rise against their Turkish oppressors; that they made

greater sacrifices than any others resisting the Austrian-German onslaught of World War I (one million killed); that they had given up historically Serbian lands after World War II (Kosovo, Vojvodina, Krajina and possibly Montenegro) to recreate Yugoslavia for the new Communist masters; that Serbs were not happy under Tito except those seduced by prime posts in the police, army and other institutions of power. I listened somewhat skeptically to her quiet recitations. One of her telling arguments was her father, Milorad Petrović, a retired general to whom she introduced me some months after I began work in Belgrade. In his early eighties, he stood over six feet with the erect bearing of a flag officer. Every morning he descended the steep slope from his home on a hilltop of the Dedinje borough in south Belgrade to swim in the Sava. The river flows more than 600 miles — swift and brown from the Julian Alps in Slovenia through Croatia to Serbia, where it joins the mighty Danube in Belgrade. The Sava, is truly a Yugoslav river as no other. General Petrović wrote a memoir of his experience in World War I that focused on the tortuous retreat of the Serbian army under massive attack from the Austro-German forces to Montenegro where, in desperate conditions, it was rescued on the coast of Albania by a French flotilla and taken to Corfu in order to recuperate, regroup and ultimately fight its way back to victory on the Salonika Front.

It was no mean feat to publish such a work when the Yugoslav Peoples Army of Marshal Tito looked disdainfully upon the men and deeds of the First World War — they did not conform or comport with their version of "Yugoslav" history wherein the only true heroes were Communists. The Reds also ignored the fact that if Milorad Petrović and his fellow-Serbs had not fought so bravely in World War I (in which the young Croat-Slovene Josip Broz fought on the OTHER side as a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian army!), there then would not have been any Yugoslavia at all. The first Yugoslavia emerged from that conflict by agreement of the peoples of Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia to form a joint state under a Serbian monarch. (In retrospect, that was a grave error in timing in a moment of history when kingdoms were tumbling right and left.) The publication was also a mark of respect for General Petrović, who was born in 1882. He gave me the two volumes (text and photographs) of his work the title *Across Albania*. His formal inscription in Cyrillic read, "to our guest Binder, as a token of friendship" and signed "Army General Milorad V. Petrović of the Yugoslav Forces in retirement." I could kick myself for not spending more time with him. He continued swimming in the Sava into his nineties, and lived nearly to the age of one hundred.

Another Serb in my early Belgrade days was Žika Stoić, an automobile *majstor* who looked after not only the fragile Steyr Fiat but also the black Thunderbird I had reluctantly purchased for my wife, Helga, from Paul Underwood, my predecessor. For $500, I took over this junk heap that Paul

had acquired from the U.S. exhibition where it had been shown at the Zagreb Trade Fair some years earlier. Its main advantage was that Žika knew how to fix it. He had a sunny disposition and an almost perfectly round face with apple cheeks — a visage I came later to recognize in fourteenth century Serbian icons. Žika wanted nothing to do with Communists and as little as possible to do with non-Serbs. He was already on his way toward becoming an entrepreneur on the modest scale that was then permitted by the Communists. His employers at the auto repair shop valued his skills so highly that they dispatched him to (then) far off Montenegro every autumn. "For what?" I inquired. "To repair tractors," he replied. Žika explained that after the harvest was brought in, Montenegrin farmers held tractor-pulling contests pitting one machine against another — the contemporary version of ancient pulling contests that pitted one team of oxen against another. "You can imagine what that does to the tractor gears," Žika remarked, adding a throaty "grrrgrrrgrrr" to reproduce the gear-grinding sound. So every autumn he traveled to Titograd with a new trunkful of tractor gears. Žika lived in what would qualify as a shack in Kentucky, crowded in a small space with his wife and baby son. We attended his *slava* (patron saint's day) celebrating what is the Orthodox Christian equivalent of a birthday party. It seemed to last about six hours literally from soup to nuts, with a lot of chicken, pork and lamb in between salads, potatoes, cabbage and at least three kinds of pastry (we usually got sick after such *slava* festivities). Eventually Žika saved enough to purchase a new dwelling. I pointed out to him that new apartment houses were shooting up across the Sava river on the northern flatlands that had been dubbed New Belgrade. He glared at me. "I would never move over there!" he declared indignantly, "that is Austria!" Indeed that had been "Austria" — the frontier of the Kingdoms and Lands represented in the Imperial Council (Hapsburg Austria) and the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen (Hungary). From there, Austrian cannons began shelling the Serbian capital on July 29, 1914 in retaliation for the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and his wife the month before in Sarajevo. The first shots of the First World War ended with the collapse and disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Now the border of Austria was some 300 miles to the northwest.

One of the Belgrade journalists with whom I became acquainted in those early days, Dragoslav Rančić, was covering foreign affairs for *Borba* (Struggle), the official daily of the ruling League of Communists ("league" drawn from Karl Marx's usage when he created the First International, the term adopted in 1952 by Tito's Yugoslavs from the Soviet Union's lackey and still "Socialist" parties). At twenty-eight, he was a noticeable presence — wiry, intense, a jutting brow over dark eyes that contained a dangerous hint lightning — and almost African curly hair. He stopped me after

one of those typically unmemorable weekly press conferences held by Avdo Humo, a suave multilingual spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Regular meetings with the press being something unique in the Communist world of those days which, apart from the Yugoslavs, was acutely allergic to anything resembling give and take between government officials and reporters.)

"You shouldn't ask such pointed questions," said the saturnine Dragan (as he liked to be called) after one of the Humo sessions. "You would get better answers."

"I'm an American," I huffed, my dander slightly up. "I ask straight questions wherever I am."

"All right," said Dragan. "It's just a suggestion."

On second thought, I took his point about being pointed which, to him, the Yugoslav, came across as being arrogant, especially a representative of a superpower in a country the size of Wyoming. Gradually we became friends, although in those days I was not allowed to visit him in the forbidding fortress of *Borba* on Marx and Engels Square (now named Square of Nikola Pašić (1845–1926), the Serbian patriot-politician), much less in his home. We continued to meet over the years as he moved on to the new Weekly *NIN* (acronym for *Nedeljne Informativne Novine* ("Weekly Informative News")) and then to *Politika*, the oldest independent daily in the Balkans, which he later represented in Moscow, Berlin and, with great distinction in Beijing. Only two decades later did I learn that Dragan was a Serb (born in Kragujevac) and that he was becoming an increasingly passionate one. That occurred in a Belgrade restaurant named *Proleće* (Springtime) on Tsarina Milice Square in the old town. The white-shirted waiter asked, "What would you like?" and to the question, what was available, shot back with a grin as broad as the Danube: "We have everything! We have *skembići* (tripe). We have stuffed peppers. We have pickled cabbage…" The idea that tripe was the first item to be included in the category of "everything" sent Dragan into gales of laughter and me, too, after he had translated *skembići*. "This is Serbia!" said Dragan, his eyes sparkling.

I visited him in 1991 in his last foreign posting in Germany just as his Yugoslav homeland was falling apart at the seams — first Slovenia, then Croatia…. He was livid, his eyes blazing as never before about "that *Ustaše* Tuđman" (the Croatian leader) and "the traitorous Slovenes." Like so many others, he was all at once a Yugoslav transformed into one of the half-dozen (or more) separate nationalities — an alarming sight. Meanwhile his vaunted *Politika* had become the mouthpiece of Slobodan Milošević, chief of the Serbian League of Communists since 1987. (*Borba*, the original party organ, had become more independent.) In 1992, he became the spokesman of President Dobrica Ćosić, a onetime Yugoslav Communist activist, then a dissident who became a celebrated novelist, then a Serbian nationalist, who finally accepting the largely ceremonial

presidency after Tito's Yugoslavia fell to pieces. I met Dragan again in 1993 in Geneva at the Vance-Owen peace talks on Bosnia. He was content that he was doing something for his people but it was apparent the mission was doomed. Milošević was using the prominent novelist as an adornment and Ćosić, having snubbed Milošević once too often in his new office, was out before the year was over.

Dragan wrote a biography of Ćosić, then circled back to journalism where remained as a foreign affairs analyst until his death in 2008.

One who never left newspapers was Aleksandar Nenadović, a *Politika* correspondent who became its chief editor and then lost that post (and even his byline!) for not accepting the party line when it suddenly changed. He never stopped being a newspaperman and he was one of the best I ever knew.

In conversation and in letters he spouted aphorisms that had the ring of folk wisdom: "You can do many things against Serbia, but you cannot do anything in the Balkans without Serbia," he wrote (prophetically) in 1989; and two years later he said of the United States: "You will come and try to help us, but we will sink our teeth into your leg and you will never be able to shake us loose." From the beginning of my Balkan days, *Saša* helped me develop a glimmer of understanding of the Yugoslav predicament. Although he occasionally published commentaries in American newspapers, I wished that he had a wider audience.

He worked in New York and Washington as the *Politika* correspondent and in the late 1980s was relegated to New York for several years (much like Dragan Rančić to Berlin) because the pro-Milošević was uncomfortable with him nearby. Saša became accustomed to the typical newspaper career phases of good-odor followed by bad-odor followed by complete odorlessness and then, if fortune smiled, a period of mild fragrance. In his case the good odor was in the 1960s. That ended abruptly in 1972 when he, along with other prominent Serbs, was accused of being "bourgeois-liberal" in the course of a countrywide ideological fumigation campaign that President Tito instigated because of Croatia's nascent independence movement, which swept on through Slovenia and even touched vulnerable Macedonia. Tito dared not pinch his native Croatia without pummeling Serbia in turn. That was his rule of thumb.

Saša's crime in Tito's eyes was to proclaim that *Politika* had a primary "responsibility toward all of its readers with respect to all events, regardless of republican or other frontiers." That, of course, was heresy in 1972 and remained so twenty years later. Along with other reform-minded Serbs including the former foreign ministers Marko Nikezić and Mirko Tepavac, Saša was cast out of the party for which they had fought in World War II as Partizans. They became "unpersons" which, in

Saša's case, meant that he was barred from publishing under his own (well-known) name — or even under his initials! In 1981, a year after the death of Tito, I interviewed Lazar Mojsov, the new president of Yugoslavia (officially "president of the presidency" in a crazed system of rotation bequeathed by the man who years earlier had made himself "president for life." Mojsov, an oleaginous opera lover and tennis player from Macedonia who had befriended George H.W. Bush at the United Nations, gave routine answers to routine questions about Yugoslavia's plummeting economy. After having finished the interview in the dreary chambers of the sprawling Federal Executive complex in New Belgrade, I said I had a personal question. He cast a suspicious glance. "How can a country as small as Yugoslavia afford to waste its greatest talents?" I began. "What do you mean?" Mojsov shot back sharply. "I mean talents like Marko Nikezić and Aleksandar Nenadović."

"Oh, Nikezić is a sculptor and he can make whatever he wants," he said with a dismissive gesture, "and Nenadović is writing." (In fact Nikezić had taken up sculpture and with such exquisite results in marble that when Henry Moore saw some of them he offered to arrange a Nikezić exhibit in London. Nikezić modestly declined.

I remarked to Mojsov that he knew very well what I meant about Nikezić the political figure and the fact that Nenadović could write, yes, but not under his own name, which was intolerable for a country that professed to have some measure of press freedom. Mojsov mumbled something and the meeting ended. Several weeks later, Saša, who had been publishing under the initials *SR* — for "foreign rubric" — got his initials *A.N.* back at the bottom of his *Politika* columns and, a few months later, his full name was restored.

Later, through Saša I met Nikezić and saw some of his marvelous busts, animals and torsos. Had Tito and his cowardly Serbian underlings allowed Nikezić (a Partizan hero after all) and his like-minded friends in Croatia and Slovenia to flourish, Yugoslavia might have taken a path toward more democracy and voluntary federal unity instead of treading the road toward self-destruction and oblivion. In retrospect, it was probably the country's last chance to stay whole.

Not that getting his name back did Saša that much good. In the late 1980s *Politika* came under the thumb of a Serbian party favorite, Dr. Živorad Minović. He had tied his fortunes to the tail of Slobodan Milošević, the new Serbian shooting star. Minović soon made certain that independent minds like Rančić and Nenadović were shoved aside. But in the end he was found to be so unpleasant that Milošević cast him aside in 1995. His end was noted in an "obituary" published the day after his ouster: "Owing to him "*Politika*" was a symbol of hatred, lies and imputations... His

responsibility for the tragedy that ensued, (was) caused by hatred, evil and base instincts on which he insisted…" It was signed Board of Editors of *Politika*. In those days it was still not customary in Serbia, at least, to talk about one's past. In Saša's case, it was humble pride as much as reticence. For years I was under the impression he came from Užice, a city in central Serbia One day I extracted from him the fact that his native place was 30 miles to the east — Trbušani, population less than 2,000. The name derives from *trbuh*, stomach or belly, he remarked. Of this *Šumadija* (forested region) he said, "It is the stomach of Serbia. That is why so many Serbs are throwing up. So many things have piled up in this stomach."

In November 1941, as the Wehrmacht moved to clean out the Chetnik-Partizan liberated area around Užice, Saša joined the Partizans. He was fourteen years old and a member of *SKOJ*, the Communist youth organization at his school in nearby Čačak. They gave him five 7.92 mm bullets and a rifle dubbed the *Partizanka*, a copy of a 1924 Mauser manufactured in nearby Kragujevac, where the Germans had executed nearly 3,000 Serbs the previous month as a reprisal for attacks on their soldiers. It was so long it was nearly "taller than me," Saša recalled. (In fact it was 43 inches long). He fired the five rounds at the Germans and then was collared in a house by a big soldier who was about to kill him when became distracted by more skirmishing and left Saša trembling for his life. Half a century later his delight was to return to Trbušani to plant and tend carrots, beans and peas for his family and friends during the civil wars of 1993–1994 a time of rampant inflation. In peacetime as in war, gray-eyed Saša was defending his people.

Having come from rich and safe America — of which Will Rogers said even in the Great Depression "we are the only people to go to the poorhouse in an automobile" — it was hard to fathom the somber depths to which Saša and fellow Serbs had been plunged by history and geography. We Americans had space and could always move in that vast geographic and social space. They could not. Saša had more wisdom for me. In 1999, on the verge of the United States-led aerial bombardment of Serbia, he remarked: "Almost all our history, from the Battle of Kosovo Field (in 1389, when Serbian Kingdom's forces were defeated by Ottoman Turks) onward we were fighting this or that enemy. That was the main preoccupation of us Serbs. True, we lost some wars. But we always thought of ourselves as winners." Then, he added sardonically: "It can't be different now, can it?" Of course it was. Over 78 days NATO bombs and rockets killed 2,500 civilians (89 of whom were children) and 1,031 soldiers and policemen. Afterward, Saša commented, again sardonically: "There is always a way out. That is the essence of our irresistible progress as well as our permanent predicament — since we manage to prolong, to postpone, to survive, we are also

inclined to endure, to accept almost anything." In time I had learned to appreciate Serbian art and popular music — not only the rollicking kolo dances, but also the sentimental songs of the Twenties and Thirties and a revival of the *Solunske Pesme* — the Salonika Front songs commemorating the victorious actions of the Serbian army in 1918. One, *Dunje Ranke* (Fresh Quince) was a children's song. Another, *Tamo Daleko* (There Far Away) was a lament for the homeland composed in the 1920s by Đorđe Marinković. Another of my favorites was *Ja sam Ja Jeremija*. It told the modest story of a farmer-soldier:

Ja sam ja Jerimija	I am I, Jeremija
Prezivam se Krstić	The surname is Krstic
Selo mi je Toponica	My village is Toponica
Drvena mi dvokolica	Wooden is my two-wheeled cart
Služio sam stari kadar artilerija	I served in the old artillery unit

Late in life I learned to my surprise that *Jeremija* had been composed not in the 1920s, when the memories of World War I were still fresh, but in 1972 by a popular accordionist, Predrag "Tozovac" Živković. This was a clear signal not just of a Serbian resurgence but also of a sign that Yugoslavia was falling apart. How different that was from my first Yugoslav days when I was trying to grasp hold of my professional responsibilities, which also extended to the vastly differing nations of Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and even hermetically sealed Albania. How would I ever cover them and simultaneously learn a bit of Serbo-Croatian, the lingua-franca (or lingua-slavica) of Yugoslavia?

After hearing about "Youth Brigades" engaged every summer in "Work Actions," I decided to enroll for a few days of total language immersion. I was greeted with almost derisive laughter at the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, which was responsible for overseeing foreign correspondents. But they arranged for me to join the Sonja Marinković Brigade.

The brigade was assigned to work on building the ''Brotherhood and Unity Highway'' from Ljubljana in Slovenia south to Djevdjilija on the Macedonian border with Greece, a project begun in 1948. Our brigade of perhaps a hundred young people from all parts of Yugoslavia was one of the last. Altogether 251,737 "brigadiers" worked on the highway. (My 1990 ''Serbo-Croatian-English Dictionary'' struggles to translate the original — Communist — coinage *radna akcija* listing "voluntary, mass, physical labor (performed by young people").) The site was near the town of Vrčin on the gentle slope of a valley. At that time the *Autoput* was an unpretentious matter of two bumpy, mostly cobblestone lanes stretching 259 miles from Zagreb to Belgrade and petering out at Vrčin

southeast of the capital. The already completed section was something to enter in the annals of road-building like the (Balkan) Via Egnatia of Roman times. Pigs, goats, horse carts, mudslicks — its only distinguishing quality was a relatively hard surface.

They handed me a shovel and, after an hour of that, a pickaxe with which to break up the monotony of dirt with the monotony of rocks. *Lopata* (shovel) and *kramp* (pickaxe) were added to my vocabulary, shortly followed by *plik* (blister) of which I rapidly acquired seven or eight on my soft bourgeois-imperialist hands. Roadwork — we were leveling a hillock — was hardly conducive to learning a language, unless grunts and groans could be construed as different in Serbo-Croatian from English or Cambodian. But the most demoralizing aspect was to see a few hundred yards down the valley, that bulldozers and a grader were doing the real work, shoving and planing tons of earth in a single plunge while we were messing around with a couple of pounds here, a rock there. Now and then we took a break to sing Partizan songs. "Tito is Crossing Romanije" and our own brigade anthem:

> Every morning e-v-e-r-y evening
> The hills of Šumadija resound
> The hills and dales are e-c-h-o-i-n-g
> With the students' energy....

Much, much later I learned that Sonja Marinković was a twenty-six-year-old intrepid Serb Communist when she was caught by the Nazis in Novi Sad in July 1941, tortured and then stood up to be shot. When the first bullet grazed her head she said without turning her back, "Shoot! These are Communist breasts!"

The temperature around Vrčin was about 95 ºF. We were stripped to the waist, the girls to their bikini bras. One girl collapsed with a heat stroke. I was immersed in sweat, but not in the Serbo-Croatian language.

The *radna akcija* seemed to be a good thing, however small its physical achievements. It was designed to bring together young people from all parts of Yugoslavia in joint projects. This made it one of the few institutions, apart from the federal party, the army and, I guess, the secret police, that joined Slovenes with Macedonians, Serbs and Croats and Bosnians. After 1963, it was disbanded as uneconomical. Watching a bulldozer fill a dump truck in 10 minutes with the amount of earth it would have taken one of us an entire day to handle with a *lopata* one could grasp the logic of that. But you cannot build a multiethnic society with mechanized equipment, and even in the Sonja

Marinković Brigade of 1963, you could detect the ethnic strains between haughty Slovenes and fun-loving Serbs.

After a week of sweat immersion I left this experiment with my souvenir blisters. Years later, passing Vrčin on the now four-lane *autoput* I would glance with a flush of pride at the place where I had shoveled earth and split rocks while muttering curses in Serbo-Croatian. I also liked to recall *radna akcija* jokes like one about the Montenegrin brigade shoveling its way up to Serbia and, when they met their Serbian counterparts somewhere in the Sandžak near Novi Pazar, were confronted with the perplexed question: "Comrades, while that is a fine road you have built, why does it have a right lane and nothing on the left?"

"We Montenegrins want to drive to Belgrade," said the brigade leader. "But we don't want to go back!"

In time I became exposed to a Serbian penchant for getting back at perceived enemies or, maybe, just about anybody. This was encapsulated in the word *inat* — translatable as "spite." That streak of mindless spitefulness is characterized by the saying: "He burned the carpet to kill three fleas." There are a number of Serbian jokes featuring "Lala from Banat" — mostly centered on spite, as in: "I wish my cow were dead so that my neighbors wouldn't get any milk."

An acquaintance, the law professor, Dragoljub Kavran, told of two neighbors who built vacation homes on a slope of Avala (at 1,677 feet the highest elevation in the vicinity of Belgrade). When the first added an elevator to his two-storey home, the second neighbor, not to be outdone, added an elevator to his house, "even though it only had one floor."

Another case of *inat* occurred in May 1965 when a visiting Croat told an anti-Serb joke and was nearly beaten up. The joke in the form of a riddle was:

"Why are the Turks such a backward people?"

"Because they spent five hundred years dominating the Serbs!"

Not long after I used this incident in a feature article about life in Belgrade, a delegation from the prestigious Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences marched the door of my apartment on Proleterskih Brigada Street with a petition denouncing this vile tale and me and *The New York Times* for printing it. Fortunately I was on the road at the time.

One of the characteristics of Balkan life strangest to me as an American, and most impressive, was fatalism. I encountered it everywhere — in Skopje on July 26, 1963 after an earthquake killed more than a thousand people. An onlooker murmured: "*JAO*! that was a big quake!"

At the scene of a train wreck on January 4, 1964 in Jajince south of Belgrade where a commuter train struck a standing passenger train, killing 66, a farmer standing nearby said to me: “That is some wreck! That’s the biggest I have ever seen!” But he did not move to help survivors, nor did others around him.

The United States air attaché in the 1960s was out at Belgrade’s Surčin airport one winter day inspecting his old DC-3, when he noticed mechanics whacking the leading wing edges of Caravelle passenger jets purchased by the JAT airline with long wooden poles. “What are you doing?” he inquired. “Knocking the ice off,” said the lead mechanic.

“You shouldn’t do that,” said the attaché. “You will dimple the wings and spoil the airfoil!”

“*Može, može,* (it’s okay, it’s okay)” the mechanic replied with a beatific smile. “This is Serbian technology.”

The air attaché, having encountered that sort of thing before, succumbing again to fatalism, shrugged and walked away.

I perceived elements of fatalism again in November 1965 while driving from Budapest to Belgrade on a two-lane yellow brick road built during the Austro-Hungarian empire — a stretch leading south from the frontier toward Subotica lined for several miles by one-storey houses. I was going about 40 miles an hour late on a Sunday morning.

In the distance was a man on a bicycle coming north. When I was almost abreast of him he suddenly turned left and veered into my lane. I slammed the brakes. Too late. I struck him thinking, “My god, I’ve killed a man.” I opened the door and went forward to see. The man lay crumpled on the yellow bricks, his bent bicycle half beneath him his *šubara* — tall hat of lambs wool — beside him. The car had only small dents. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a blue-uniformed militia officer slowly approaching.

All at once the bicyclist groaned, rubbed himself, stood up, retrieved his *šubara*, brushed himself off, picked up his bicycle, attempted to straighten its bent frame and started to wheel it toward a side road.

“Where are you going?” the militia officer demanded.

“Home,” said the bicyclist.

“Why did you turn here against the traffic?”

“I ALWAYS turn here.”

“Are you drunk?”

“OF COURSE I’m drunk! It’s Sunday isn’t it?”

“Oh, BE OFF with you!” shouted the militiaman.

My favorite fatalism over all the years was *Biće Skoro Propast Sveta* (The End of the World Is Coming Soon) the title of a film by Aleksandar Petrović who wrote the lyrics of the Gypsy song composed by Vojislav Kostić, which after proclaiming the approaching “end of the world” said, in the second verse, “Let it come, it doesn’t matter.”

Another kind of fatalism unfolded on July 1, 1966 when Aleksandar Ranković, for two decades the second most powerful man in Yugoslavia and widely seen (in the Western press) as the heir apparent to Josip Broz Tito, seventeen years his elder, was denounced and ousted from all his party and state offices. He was fifty-seven. I had shaken his hand once at a state reception and looked him in the eye, but he was a shy man, not given to small talk.

As Marko, his *nom de guerre*, or Leka, his familiar nickname, Ranković was famous throughout the country as a Partizan fighter who had been seized and tortured by the Gestapo then dramatically freed. With the rank of major general, he became head of OZNA, the military intelligence organization in 1944 and remained chief of intelligence services thereafter. He was born to impoverished parents in a village southwest of Belgrade, joined the Party as a teenager, and was arrested and imprisoned for six years.

Now, a special session of the Party Central Committee convened at the verdant Adriatic island of Brioni that also served as one of Tito’s vacation homes to condemn Ranković for leading a “factional group.” Among the charges listed against the “conspirators” was the planting of listening devices in Tito’s bedroom, which Ranković flatly denied. But he did accept “moral responsibility” for other transgressions by the secret police and — fatalistically — submitted his resignation.

Twelve years earlier the Central Committee had also convened at Brioni to rid the party of Milovan Djilas, the great dissident of the twentieth century who had been even closer to Tito than Ranković. The only veteran Communist who remained at Tito’s side was Edvard Kardelj, a dour Slovene school teacher. In earlier days, there had been a somber party hymn sung by veteran Partisans that began with their names in the first verse: “TI-to, KAR-delj, RAN-KO-VIĆ and DJI-las…” Now, if sung at all, it was “TI-to, KAR-delj, HUH-HUH-HUH and HUH-HUH…”

Within twenty-four hours of the Brioni plenum, Serbs were reciting a mordant joke:

Ranković goes to a café in a Sumadija village and orders a coffee. A Serbian peasant approaches his table and asks: “Are you well-known?’

“I’m not,” the customarily reticent Ranković replied.

“But I know your face.” says the peasant. “were you a soccer player?”

“Not,” Ranković replies.

“Movie actor?”

“Not,” says Ranković.

“Then what is your profession?”

“I was with the former government,” says Ranković.

“Long live the king!” the peasant shouts.

For the next seventeen years Ranković lived quietly in his political pariah status, loyal to the party that deposed him and its leader — who betrayed him. We journalists, domestic and foreign, had no way to get his side of the story. Only by careful reading of the official version could one detect discrepancies and contradictions.

He did not live long enough to see his vindication in 1990 in a book entitled “Pardon Without Mercy” in which two journalists, Pero Simić and Jovan Kesar disclosed that Tito had conspired with a fellow Croat, General Ivan Krajačić to have the electronic bugs placed in the presidential bedroom to provide “evidence” against Ranković.

Rather, absolution came at his death in 1985 when tens of thousands of Serbs gathered in Belgrade’s New Cemetery to pay their respects, probably the largest spontaneous demonstration in the capital since March 1941 when a huge throng gathered to protest against the royal government’s pact with Hitler Germany. Back then they shouted: *Bolje Rat Nego Pakt!* (“Better War Than the Pact!”). Now they simply chanted “Leka! Leka!”

In 1990, as Yugoslavia was falling apart I looked up Zlatko Sinobad (b. 1923). He was a press official in the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs when I first came to Belgrade. We became friends. I knew he had been a Partizan because a journalist told me that when his unit was relaxing after a battle with the Wehrmacht, he spotted a soldier drawing on a large piece of paper while the rest of the unit was eating, drinking or sleeping. The soldier was Zlatko Sinobad.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Dividing up the land.” Zlatko replied. I knew him as a Yugoslav. But I did not know his ethnicity — only that he was from Knin, in the southwestern hills of Croatia. He remained a committed party member throughout his career as a diplomat and as a radio-television executive. All at once Zlatko told me he was a Serb. It was a bit of a shock, which was amplified when he revealed that he belonged to the Uskok (“uskok” derived from a Slavic word for “ambush”) clan of Sinobads that had been knighted by the Republic of Venice in the seventeenth century for services against the Ottoman Empire. He told me this softly and, as was his modest manner.

I then called on Milovan Djilas at his home at 8 Palmotićeva Street. He was talking with his customary Saturday night guests, the Serbian novelist Dobrica Ćosić and the Montenegrin poet Matija Bečković. When he introduced me as an American, his guests loudly reproached me:

"Why don't you come to the aid of us Serbs?"

"We were your allies in two world wars!"

"Why are you supporting the enemies of Serbia?

I replied evenly: "Look. For forty-five years you have been calling yourselves Yugoslavs. All of a sudden you start calling yourselves Serbs. That is confusing to Americans!"

Djilas, sitting opposite them on a couch smiled and said softly. "Binder is right."

These were painful times for Serbs. Tito's Yugoslavia had begun by stripping away Kosovo — birthplace of the Serb kingdom in the Middle Ages — from the direct authority of Belgrade. From 1946 to 1974 it was defined as the Yugoslav Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. In addition, the rich breadbasket region of Vojvodina was accorded a limited degree of autonomy within Serbia. Tito, the Croat-Slovene, used Serbs — as he had during World War II — as soldiers and as intelligence officers but the minute they showed signs of becoming independent or rivals he brutally demoted them.

Djilas was one of the first to experience this. He himself was proud of his Montenegrin heritage, but he stated to me: "Montenegrins are basically Serbs, adding:

"I think all of my life as a Serb. I've been a revolutionary, I feel revolutionary now."

But, he warned, there was a powerful streak of obsequiousness in the Serbs: "When suffering oppression under Tito, the Serbs were slavish. And they were slavish under King Aleksandr. Two years ago the Serbian intellectuals were for Slobodan Milošević. Now they rebel. But when they are in freedom, Serbs are rascals."

Serbs: subservient or rebellious? Or something else?

One day Ion Talpes, a Romanian intelligence officer in Communist days, told me a folk saying from his country: "You will no sooner find a calm Serb than you will a green cow."

KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

In my early Balkan years, contact with Albanians was severely limited. (Albania itself was, for Westerners, as inaccessible outer space.) Yugoslavia's province of Kosovo and Metohija (abbreviated as Kosmet in those days) was even then largely Albanian-inhabited and off-limits for us foreign correspondents. Journeys there had to be registered and approved by the Foreign Ministry.

I discovered incidentally that none of my Serbian acquaintances spoke a word of Albanian. If they ever bothered to speak of Kosovo at all they invariably referred to Albanians there using the word "shiptar" a corruption of *shqiptar* (Albanian in the Albanian language), which in Serbian seemed to carry a connotation of disparagement, similar to "nigger." The sole phonograph record with Albanian folk songs available in Belgrade music stores was a .45 rpm disc with four lilting songs starting with *Martesa e Lumtun* (Happy Wedlock) performed by the *Orkestar Radio Pristine* — quite beautiful, too. Clearly, it was not going to be easy to approach Albanians either within their state frontiers or in the diaspora.

The first Albanian I met was Ruzdija, a wiry Kosovan with a week's growth of beard. In the autumn he arrived at our apartment in Proleterskih Brigada Street to tend our coal-burning furnace, a task he performed with punctilio. A sweet-natured man, he told us he was supporting two wives — a winter wife and a summer wife — and children — in Kosovo.

The off-limits status for Kosovo was removed in 1965, the last year of the supposed *tvrda ruka* (steel fist) policy allegedly conducted by the *UDBA* secret police toward the Albanian population in Kosovo — even then the huge numerical majority — 75 percent. The policy was under the guidance of Vice President Aleksandar Ranković.

Permission was granted to drive around for a week in the purportedly autonomous province. If Yugoslavia was then mostly in the second world (that is "Socialist" except for a scattering of successful enterprises), Kosovo was then definitely in the third world of primitive economic conditions, illiteracy and a vague sense that someone was watching you. And somebody was watching — earlier in the 1960s some 300 ethnic Albanians had been tried on charges of irredentism, subversion and espionage while 9,000 firearms had been confiscated, mostly in police raids. (On a farm they even discovered a German tank — left behind from World War II — hidden in a barn, the Albanian farmer thinking, "Well, you never know, perhaps a tank will come in handy one day…")

My first stop was Pristina's Kosovski Bozur, the Hotel of Kosovo Peony, named for the red spring flowers that bloomed on the nearby Kosovo Polje battlefield — purportedly reflecting the blood of Serbian soldiers killed by the Turkish legions in 1389 (as if the Turkish warriors shed no blood). "Others to be avoided" said the Fodor Guide for Yugoslavia of the Pristina's remaining hostelries in comparison to the Peony. Built only two years earlier, it was already run down — a three-storey structure with fly-specked windows, dusty muslin curtains and flea-infested bedsheets. And (or but) this was a Serbian establishment.

Sitting at a drink-stained table in the funky atmosphere of the dimly lit restaurant was a red-faced German in his forties, morosely sipping a flaccid beer that had been brewed in the Vaterland. He was alone. For company I sat down opposite him and asked what he was doing there in "the Kosmet."

"*Ich verbloede*" he replied, employing an almost untranslatable phrase (literally "I am stupefying myself"). "I've been here eight years … *und ich verbloede*." He then unloosed a torrent of frustrations about working as a mining engineer — pumps — with mainly Serbs: their lassitude, their ignorance of organizational concepts, and their indifference to breakdowns… It made me wonder whether his professional ancestors from Saxony — hired by the Serbian kings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to use their expertise in extracting silver, copper and lead from the mineral rich depths of Kosovo — faced similar frustrations as they helped make the Serbs wealthy. In any case this was a powerful cautionary tale about the danger of making oneself more stupid, among Serbs, and I took it to heart, even if I did not learn it by heart.

I looked around town, which had a population of about 30,000 — the majority of them Serbs (today it is more than ten times larger and virtually all Albanians) living in low clusters of houses — a typical trading center at what had always been a Balkan crossroads. Pristina seemed to possess no historical sites, no noteworthy monuments.

Next day I drove about 5 miles northwest to the battlefield where 12,000 or more Serbs fought 27,000 Ottoman Turks or more — the majority of them perishing — on June 15, 1389. The dusty plain was brown in the summer's heat, punctuated by a few forlorn acacia trees, a monument here, a monument there in crumbling disrepair, surrounded by parched weeds. For this Christendom — and Serbdom — suffered an irreparable defeat? For this Albanians would dispute the last toponym? (Changing the ending of Kosovo, a Serbian word meaning place of blackbirds, from "o" to "a" — with similar spelling adaptations all over the province!)

But it is very difficult to place ourselves in the shoes of our ancestors or their neighbors.

In any case, I realized that the Battle of Kosovo with its legacy of 600 years of Turkish occupation and cultural suppression had deeply imbued Serbian culture and history. Kosovo returned to Serbian sovereignty only in 1912.

Never underestimate a myth. In Serbia it continues to inspire in music and in the visual arts. The verse "Smiljana" was composed in 1995 by Zoran Dašić guitarist for the Belgrade quartet *Legende* which evokes the sweetheart of a fallen Kosovo knight:

> Smi, Smiljana
> Beside the wounded waters
> From her sleeve she drew
> And laid three green wreaths
> The first for herself
> The second for her girlfriend
> The third she laid in the spring freshet
> And she whispered to the third,
> Float, float my green wreath
> 'Til you reach Jovo's castle.

A much older expression of Kosovo inspiration awaited me at nearby Gračanica: the Church of the Annunciation completed in 1321 under King Milutin (Stefan Uroš), who represented the fourth generation of the Nemanja rulers who had created Serbia, and the third to wear the royal crown. The interior of the five-domed structure was almost entirely covered with a fresco ensemble of a hundred saints, scenes of the Last Judgment, Milutin and his child bride Princess Simonida Palaiologina from Byzantine Constantinople.

At Gračanica the eyes of the original Simonida fresco were mere holes — "An Albanian's knife robbed you of your sight" wrote Milan Rakić (1876–1938), one of Serbia's greatest poets. (In fact the eyes of many of the figures in Kosovo church frescoes had been stabbed out by some sort of blade.)

In the late afternoon at Gračanica a lone painter was going to work restoring damaged frescoes — though not Simonida. He seemed unsteady on his feet and smelled strongly of brandy. "I just got up," he explained. "I work at night with artificial light to get just the right tones." He moved off toward a homemade ladder. Around him lustrous figures glowed in the last rays of daylight and this was but one of ten such frescoed church treasures of the Middle Ages in the Kosovo region.

Twenty years later at the height of a Serbian national revival, Kosta Bradić, a Serbian artist I had known for a long time, painted a copy of the Simonida fresco — the queen wearing a tall crown,

bedecked with gems and holding a gem-studded staff of authority in her right hand. In his Simonida copy, which he presented to me, Kosta Bradić had restored the queen's eyes, a pale gray-blue.

Who could deny the Serbs that crowded hour of glory in the thousand years of their nation? Who could deny the Albanians their lands in Kosovo? And could they ever live side by side as they had before 1389 among the peonies and the blackbirds?

While in Pristina, I met Tatomir Vukanović (1907–1997), an eminent historian and ethnologist who was working in a small historical museum. He gave me copies of some of his studies on such varied topics as migration of Albanian clans to the Drenica region of Kosovo in the seventeenth century (a study of importance to both Serbs and Albanians as to "who came first" to that part of Kosovo); "vampire pumpkins and watermelons" (Gypsies believed that if left to rot after a harvest, these turned into scary creatures); neolithic blind statues: and women who remained virgin, cut their hair, carried weapons and smoked tobacco while becoming heads of households in Albanian (and some Gypsy) families — possibly practices carried down from the ancient Illyrians. He also gave me a copy of an ancient household deity, cast from an original — about 4,000 years old — of the Vinča culture from an archeological site near the Danube.

Tatomir Vukanović moved to Belgrade after he retired. I visited him there in his tiny apartment in 1994 during the civil wars of Yugoslavia who, after brewing me a *turska* cup of coffee, said in a mild voice, "Mankind will always make wars. I have lived through five of them." Then he counted the First and Second Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, World War I, World War II and the Yugoslav conflict that began in 1991.

After having been exposed to these Serbian treasures, I searched, but was unable to find, either artworks or compositions by Kosovo Albanians of any merit or lasting significance, although ethnic Albanians had been documented as present in various parts the region for hundreds of years.

My next stop was on the Metohija plain west of Pristina at the home of the Imer clan, which lies in the shadow of the *Prokletije* (Accursed) Mountains near the town of Skivjan. The Imers were presumably selected for me by the Serbian authorities in Pristina as acceptable folk. They were still distinctively Albanian — living in a *kula*, a stone and masonry tower with small windows that could be used as gunports in troubled times. (When I returned two decades later there were many new *kula*s, bigger and fancier than that of the Imers, but with the same forbidding gun embrasures — that is they were small fortresses built in an immemorial tradition. They also called those mountains to the west "accursed" (*namuna* in Albanian).

At the entrance to the tower, Kadri presented himself as the "deputy head," at age 33, of the Imer household, explaining that his Uncle Osman, 50, was the head. He invited me in for coffee, sweets and homegrown apples. He seated me on a low divan with a colorful woven covering, as were half a dozen other Imer men folk. There were no women in sight then or years later. Kadri assured me that all of the men in his 26-member clan could read and write, except his father, who was 90. The Kadri men were a great exception. According to the 1948 census 73.73 percent of the Albanians were categorized as illiterate and most did not even know the Albanian alphabet. That was a sharp contrast to hermetically sealed, Stalinist Albania, only 10 miles to the west, where education was compulsory despite a much lower living standard. Clearly, Yugoslav socialism had not penetrated very deeply into Metohija, while ancient Albanian traditions such as the white woolen *kesule* skullcap worn by the Imri men, remained powerful. That included the pooling of all earnings — from the sale of Imer apples, melons and peppers at the town market and the combined wages of four Imers from construction work — totaling the equivalent of $3,200 in that year. The Imers met in family council to decide how the money would be spent, with Uncle Osman having the last word on purchases like a radio or new shoes for the children. (Serbian extended families might have decided such matters that in way in earlier times, but no longer.) But attitudes toward large families were changing among for some Albanians. Kadri said two children were enough for him. There were other couples around with nine children and counting. Abnormally large families seemed to be the rule.

In an elemental way, at least in Kosovo, they — six-tenths of the Kosovo population in 1965, eight-tenths in 1981, nine-tenths in 1996 — constituted the Albanian answer to the challenge of eight centuries of Serbian history.

Another fundamental issue of Albanians in Yugoslavia was education — in 1965 only 55 per cent of the children aged 7 to 19 attended school. There was an additional problem of language when much of the instruction was in Serbian for children from families that spoke only Albanian. Moreover, in the 1960s the Serbian authorities often treated Albanian teachers with great suspicion, which sometimes resulted in arrests, even beatings.

However there was an ingrained prejudice among Albanian males against education for Albanian females. Only about one-quarter of the 564 pupils at Hajdar Dushi Gymnasium (named for a Kosovo Albanian Partizan killed in battle at age 28 in 1944) in nearby Djakovica, a city then of 24,000, were girls. The principal, Ekrem Murtezi, said he was proud there were that many. "To us it is fantastic! When I was studying there was only one girl in our school!" In those days the Albanians had no

university of their own. When they finally got one in 1970 it ballooned in a decade to 35,000 students (still few of them women). Mass education helped change the Kosovo equation because it led to empowerment of hundreds of thousands of Albanians even as they remained at the bottom of the income ladder in Federal Yugoslavia. All at once, Serbians found themselves in a minority, not merely in numbers, but in daily life.

Before that happened I saw on the last stage of that first Kosovo visit a singular example of a Serb-Albanian symbiosis in the town of Peć. This was the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate, a monastery centered around the Temple of the Holy Apostle, completed in 1250. With its three thick-walled churches and stunning frescoes it was the holiest site of the Serbian faith.

A single Albanian guarded the complex. Clad in a brown business suit, Rame Nikci proffered a visiting card that described him as a school administrator. But in the confines of the Patriarchate he functioned as the *Vojvod* (chieftain — in Serbian) responsible for its defense in times of danger or war. Within the thick walls amid flickering votive candles, I was confronting not just this soft-spoken bureaucrat, but also the designated representative of the entire Kelmendi clan of the Rugova Gorge — Albanians famed for their swordsmanship and for their pride.

Ten generations earlier in the seventeenth century, the Serbs of the region felt renewed pressure from their Turkish conquerors. In the wake of Ottoman defeats of Roman Catholic armies headed by Austrians, Hungarians and Poles in nearby territories, the Orthodox Serbs decided to retreat northward to safer ground. Led by their Patriarch, Arsenius Crnojević, they migrated 200 miles northward to Vojvodina (a fatal move, one might argue, in terms of defense of the homeland). But to protect the Patriarchate at Peć, the Serbs obtained the vow of a Kelmendi chieftain to guard the churches. The chieftain pledged his *besa*, his word of honor, the most solemn vow an Albanian can make (or to break on pain of death and dishonor). The vow was in keeping with an Albanian tradition of respect for holy places even though the Kelmendi were by this time Muslims. Concerning the task of guarding Peć, *Vojvod* Rame Nikci said that of the nine who preceded him, “Not one died a natural death.” Among them was Regja, who was assigned the guardianship at age 12 in the eighteenth century. He was killed by bandits as he defended the church. So, too, was Rame’s father, murdered in 1939 by 230 Albanians “who were jealous,” he said, and his grandfather, great grandfather and great-great grandfather, He recited their names: Zhuji, Veseli, Muca, Elezi and Plaku. “Sulo was killed, too, and the three sons of Sulo,” defending the Patriarchate. Rame Nikci was named the Vojvod at age 12 in 1942 and once he had to face down bandits. Of course, strength lay not merely in the first Kelmendi *besa*, but in the fact that the entire clan would seek revenge

against any trespasser, rushing down from the Rugova Gorge, the narrow sides of which rise 1,000 feet above the rushing waters of the Bistrica. How did it feel to inherit such a responsibility? “Our duty was not compensated by money,” he replied. “It was an act of brotherhood.” Reflecting on two decades of calm, he said. “I am the last *vojvod* — the Patriarchate needs no protection today.” (He seems to have been right. In the following decades, as more and more violent acts — torching and looting — were carried out by Albanian separatists against Serbian churches in Kosovo, the Peć Patriarchate complex of was left intact.)

Rame Nikci said he preferred to practice the unique sword dance of his Kelmendi clan, a leaping, crouching, twirling imitation of a sword duel in the white woolen jacket and trousers with broad black stripes winding snakelike around the legs and a white turban wrapped around his head that was “long enough to make a shroud. He said: “I learned it myself from a clansman, Alija Tahir, when he was 110 years old.”

“The last *vojvod*” — I have thought about him since — said that such a noble fraternal tradition died out. Could it have made a difference in the 1980s and 1990s when ethnic rivalry flamed up anew between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija? Would it have helped to broadcast that Arsenius Crnojević, the Patriarch who led the first great exodus of Serbs from Kosovo, was descended from the Crnojevci clan, from which the greatest Albanian leader against the invading Turks, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1405–1468), also descended?

The dilemma of Kosovo sharpened in the years after my first visit. Repeated violent protest demonstrations by Albanians occurred in 1968 and on to sustained protests in March and April 1981 that spread from Pristina to other Kosovo municipalities. Altogether eleven were killed, including two militiamen.

But if the Serbs had been too repressive in the early post-war years, they leaned far over in the opposite direction afterward — perhaps too far. The “Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region” of 1947 was renamed the Autonomous Province of Kosovo-Metohija in 1963 and the Autonomous Province of Kosovo in 1969 (this time without the “Metohija” — meaning Serbian Orthodox church lands). Each time with more subsidies, powers and rights for the Albanian population — the premise being that by promoting Albanians to top-level jobs they could be co-opted into serving larger Serbian and Yugoslav interests.

Albanians saw it differently: More power, the majority of the newly-minted leaders thought, meant more power to create an Albanian-ruled Kosovo. Some of the billions in federal Yugoslav subsidies pumped into Kosovo were diverted to Albanian purchases of land from Serbs, thus

stimulating further migration. The Albanization of Kosovo proceeded at an almost alarming pace. Amendments to the Yugoslav constitution permitted the "Kosovars" as the Albanians had begun to call themselves to block or veto legislation in the Federal Executive Council (the highest institution of government) if they didn't like it. Representation in the Federal Parliament equal to that of the republics was also established. Kosovo (or *KosovA*, as the Albanians began to spell it!) got its own provincial bank, supreme court and civil administration. Heady stuff. President Tito became a minor hero of the Kosovo Albanians for his decisive role in these changes — further examples of his never-ending tinkering with the Yugoslav machine to keep it in balance, often creating new troubles to be fixed. One of Belgrade's more risky concessions was the right of Pristina Albanians to import textbooks and other educational materials — but also visiting professors — from Tirana, the capital of Tito's sworn enemy and the last outpost of Stalinism in Europe. Whatever the Yugoslav government might have hoped from this, it remained a case of one-way traffic.

Then the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. Suddenly the agents of *SUP,* the Federal Secretariat for Interior, "discovered 57 or 58 illegal organizations of nationalists and irredentists," as a Pristina official told me. Twenty "ringleaders" got 15-year sentences; another 480 lighter terms; 1,200 detained for several months. Virtually the entire ethnic Albanian leadership was dismissed on grounds they had indulged the growth of "nationalism." Their replacements were Albanians in the main, but of the Uncle Tom variety, or so it seemed.

I returned in November 1982 to meet some of the new team of purportedly subservient Kosovans. The train trip to provincial capital was instructive. At 11 p.m. the old Belgrade station was like a scene out of a 1930s movie in black and white: billows of steam from old locomotives, piping train whistles, the chuff-chuff of engines, Gypsies in their wide trousers and jackets with little children squalling at their knees, their thick-skirted women surrounded by huge parcels and suitcases. Into the sleeping car squeezed three huge men in shiny new black windbreakers hanging low over dark trousers, all three with close-cropped hair. (Cops, I thought.) One of them, his shoulders too broad for the door, edged sideways into the compartment and threw a shoulder bag onto the upper bunk. He was heading for Pristina, he allowed, dragging on a cigarette next to me at the corridor window. "On business?" I inquired. "On service," he replied, making plain that was all I needed to know. On arrival six hours later at the wretched station at Kosovo Polje, he and his fellow cops were met by a new blue Volkswagen van marked *Milicija* and driven 10 miles to the capital. I followed in a dimly lit public bus to the newest in Kosovo hostelries, the "five star" Grand Hotel Pristina. This ten-story structure, a skyscraper by local standards, was new. But like the old-new *Kosovski Bozur* it was

already run down with stained carpets, torn bedding, barely functioning plumbing, broken light fixtures, a dead radio and elevators that creaked like those of an old mineshaft. Later that morning, before meeting the local leaders, I saw the "plain clothes" cops from Belgrade patrolling the main street, about as inconspicuous as champion bullfighters.

The Albanian I was told to meet was a heavy-shouldered man of fifty-seven, Ismaili Bajram, whose title was Member of the Presidium of the League of Communists of Kosovo. For most of the next hour he harangued in a very loud voice — as though I were a disobedient farm animal — on how stability was "increasing every day" in Kosovo, how "traitors" were being punished, how the school year had begun "without hostile actions, though of course you do find graffiti slogans painted here and there." (It had to be one of the worst "interviews" ever.) Ten years later I heard that Bajram was sacked in disgrace for maintaining clandestine connections with party members who had been dismissed as Albanian nationalists following the uprising of 1981, and for having enriched himself at public expense.

That evening the traditional *corso* familiar in all Mediterranean towns of linked-arm promenading on the main street illustrated the depth of the new hostility in Kosovo — Serbs walking on the north side in little groups and Albanians on the south side. My companions from the Belgrade train were there, too "on service."

Still Albanians were permitted some of their recently won privileges: next day a wedding party passed by in twenty cars — the last automobile bearing large red flags with the twin black eagles — the ancient symbol of the Albanians, topped by the gold stars then in use by Enver Hoxha's regime in Tirana. It was legal, but still frowned on by the Serbs after the 1981 riots, like the new sign on the Kosovo *Polje* (Field) railroad station in Albanian — Kosovo *Fushe*.

I left this time with two impressions — that the Serbs had bungled yet again by simply assigning tasks to "their" Albanians rather than trying to engage them in mutual interests, and that the Kosovo Albanians suffered from the fourth cardinal sin of (overweening) pride.

Their tribal history, remarkable as it might be, gave Albanians the idea that they were superior to Serbs, better for that matter than their isolated but vastly more educated kinfolk in Albania itself. After all, had not the Kosovo Albanians "created the idea" of Albanian statehood in a meeting of clan leaders, founding what they called The League of Prizren? That being a town in southern Kosovo which was also the capital of the Serbian Empire from 1331 to 1371. (This claim, like others made by Albanians did not correspond with the fact that a number of the League's eighty members were from the three other Albanian *vilayets* (provinces) designated by their Ottoman overlords.

Altogether these four *vilayets* encompassed portions of what later became Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania and Montenegro. It also provides the basis for persistent and loud Albanian nationalist claims on large pieces of four neighboring states into the twenty-first century)

The main contribution of the Kosovo Albanians to that founding moment of state- and nationhood was the town of Prizren. The assembled clan chieftains composed a message to the Congress of Berlin in 1878 that pleaded for recognition by the great powers of the day of the Albanian nation. The host of the Congress and its creator, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, dismissed their plea with a high and mighty statement appropriate to an imperialist: "Albania is merely a geographic expression — there is no Albanian nation." (Karl May, 1842–1912, Germany's vastly popular cowboy fiction chronicler, had yet to turn his attention to heroic tales of Albanians.) Bismarck concluded that it was better for the scattered Albanians to live under the Ottomans than under resurgent Serbs or Greeks. Although the League of Prizren soon disintegrated, it marked a seminal awakening.

The demonstrations in Pristina and other Kosovo towns reinforced a dissonance between Kosovo Albanians and citizens of Albanian proper as well as Serbs. The dissonance was heightened by other factors: Kosovo Albanians, as poor as they might be compared to other Yugoslavs, were nearly twice as prosperous as Tirana Albanians — and more than twice as free. But the Kosovans were twice as backward compared to Albania in terms of literacy, the rights of women and other aspects of an unreformed patriarchal society.

Yet increasing numbers of Kosovo Albanians dreamed of a Greater Albania — ruled not from Tirana, but from Pristina. The other dynamic that became apparent around this time was that four of five of the Albanians educated in the new schools and universities of Kosovo had no job prospects whatsoever in the region — a further ingredient of future unrest.

A quarter of a century after I encountered Rame Nikci, I met Ibrahim Rugova, the forty-four-year-old literary critic who had founded the Democratic League of Kosovo in December 1989. That was eight months after the Provincial Assembly had voted to revoke Kosovo's autonomy granted in President Tito's 1974 Constitution of Yugoslavia. The League succeeded in enrolling 300,000 members, 2,000 of whom were "non-Albanians," he said. A slender chain smoker, with a signature silk scarf draped loosely around his neck, Rugova was ensconced his League's office in a kind of ramshackle barracks with no computers, no fax machine — just a telephone. His aims were peaceful, he declared. Although he had taken part in Pristina protests that turned violent on November 28, 1968 — significantly the "Flag Day" of neighboring Albania when rioters demanded secession from Serbia plus unification with Albania, as they did in the 1981 riots.

But from the time I first met him on to his death in 2006, Rugova remained committed to struggle by peaceful means, even as other Albanian activists were turning to more and more violence, eventually forming the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* (Kosovo Libertion Army) in 1996. Ultimately the KLA prevailed — with considerable covert assistance by German army trainers and the massive support of a NATO — mostly American — bombing campaign that lasted 79 days. Serbian forces, undefeated on the ground, ceding control supposedly to international (United Nations) supervision and withdrew from Kosovo. Rugova was appointed Kosovo's first president in 2002. He died of lung cancer in 2006.

As I was assembling these recollections it occurred to me (very belatedly) that someone named Rugova might have something to do with the Kelmendi clan of Rame Nikci whose home was the Rugova Gorge.

Sure enough, Ibrahim Rugova was born at Cerce, near Istog just northeast of Peć to a family that belongs to the Kelmendi clan. His father Ukë Rugova and his paternal grandfather Rrustë Rugova joined the Fascists when their part of Metohija was occupied by Italian forces in May 1941 and was governed as part of Mussolini's short-lived and greatly enlarged Albania. Two years later when Italy's government collapsed, the German Wehrmacht took over and recruited for its new SS division, named Skanderbeg. In January 1945 the senior Rugovas were summarily executed as collaborators by Yugoslav Partizans.

One element missing from my Balkan experiences was familiarity with Turks — and the Ottoman heritage that lingered in so many places, customs and language: *Kaldrma* the huge cobblestones of the old roads that were torture for modern vehicles; *sevdalinka*, the stately and melancholic harmonies of the traditional Bosnian songs of love and longing, *ajvar*, (from the Turkish word for caviar) the roasted pepper spread that Serbs used as a caviar substitute for caviar. …I failed to visit Turkey itself until 2001. But I did meet one Turk, Salih Zucanin, a native of Kosovo. He had been a Partizan at the end of World War II and was threatened with execution after being taken prisoner by Bulgarian soldiers until he said, "I am a Turk." I got to know Salih when he was the driver of the US ambassador, a job he held for three decades.

One day Salih told me an old yarn about a young Turk from Macedonia who was so bright that he was sent to Istanbul to study at Rüstem Pasa Madrasa:

"After graduation he returned to his town and announced that he was the new imam. The townsmen gathered and said, "But we like our old imam! Go back to Istanbul!" They threw stones and chased him away, The young man returned to the Rüstem Pasa Madrasa and asked for advice. A

teacher told him to use flattery and gave a hint as to the method. Arriving in his hometown, the young Turk told the mosque congregation: “I have been to Istanbul at the Blue Mosque and there I was told that your imam is the wisest and most holy imam in the entire empire and that one hair of his beard is more blessed than the Koran itself, so holy is he. The congregation then crowded around the old imam and began plucking out his wiry beard, some hair by hair, others grabbing whole hanks – causing such pain that the ancient one succumbed. They declared the young madrasa graduate their new imam.”

Kosovo, today is a nominally independent (and Albanian-ruled) state created by the United States and some European governments. It was the cradle of the Serbian nation and now is the family bed of the Albanians. It has been the tomb of too many of both peoples.

BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA

My first exposure to Bosnia and Hercegovina came early in my Balkan days when who knows why or how — but one day in the summer of 1963, the government of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina got the idea of organizing a raft trip to display the beauties of the storied Drina River to outsiders.

First the *Republički Komitet za Informacije* solicited members of the foreign press corps in Belgrade, which probably numbered a score or more. I was the sole one to accept. They turned to the diplomatic corps, which was considerably larger. Only the Venezuelan embassy accepted. A mere handful of Yugoslav journalists displayed interest — but together with a couple of wives enough to make up a raft party of a dozen.

The motley crew descended from a bus on a hot August morning at Sčepan Polje, where the Tara and Piva rivers join to the Drina, whence it courses through what had been the old *Pašaluk* ("pasha's domain" — from the Turkish) of Hercegovina. Tied up on the right bank was a raft made of fourteen long, thick pine logs. In the middle was a broad platform of boards on which stood some low chairs. Near it a pig was already roasting on a spit over a brazier of coals. Bottles of wine and beer lay in the creases between logs keeping cool in the 60 degree water. This was not the Nile, but we were being treated by the Bosnians like a pharaoh.

At bow and stern were rough-hewn tiller posts for the 18-foot sweeps. Manning the stern was Ahmed Osmanspahić, tall, slender, wearing a faded blue beret and no shoes. As soon as we settled on the platform, he pushed off and we were borne downstream in the swift current — at a velocity of what seemed like 5 miles per hour. With the encouragement of Ahmed, I stripped and jumped into the jade green water, swimming along side for a bit. The Venezuelan ambassador sat peacefully by himself in his white Panama hat, listening to his portable radio.

We zipped past spectacular rock faces and dark forests of the steep valley, here and there the red-tiled roofs of peasant cottages. The only town I can recall passing was Foča, although Ahmed must have pointed out Ustikolina, his birthplace. We stopped when several women asked to go ashore so they could relieve themselves in a degree of privacy. Ahmed steered us to the right bank next to a thick stand of trees. The silence was suddenly broken by piercing screams. The women reappeared, their clothes in disarray. *"Medved! Medved!*" (Bear, Bear!) one yelled as she dashed onto the raft. All at once a beast appeared — not a bear, but a brown cow. Raucous laughter erupted on the raft,

accompanied by the hoots of husbands — “a bear with horns!” one shouted. Enraged, the women punched and slapped their tormentors.

Ahmed steered us to a spa just below Višegrad where we spent the night, some sixty miles downstream from Sčepan Polje. Next day we viewed the magnificent Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge, completed in the sixteenth century and made famous again in the twentieth century in Ivo Andrić’s novel, *Bridge on the Drina*, admired its eleven graceful arches and then strolled about Višegrad. I walked up the main street in the company of Duško Trifunović. The budding Bosnian Serb poet, then 30, was in our rafting party. When we passed a shoeshine stand, I looked down and saw the old shoes I had chosen for the rigors of the river looking as though I had waded through flood waters. Duško and I chatted as my shoes were being shined. Looking down I murmured, “Duško, he changed the color of my shoes from brown to red!”

Duško spewed a stream of invective at the shoe shiner until all at once he stood up and shouted:

“Shut up! I know what I am doing and when I am finished his shoes will look better than they do now!”

Duško’s jaw dropped. “He told me to shut up!” he said, astonished. To shut up!” We left it at that.

Dinner was laid on at outdoor restaurant under an awning, with a trio of accordion, violin and guitar playing accompaniment for a fleshy singer to what I now suppose was a *sevdalinka* (a melancholy love song). It was raining.

Suddenly the singer, a freckled redhead, plumped down in the narrow space beside me, placed her hefty left forearm around my neck and began a new song with her mouth close to my ear. Her nasal voice resonated painfully against the eardrum.

“Where are you from?” I asked when she finished her ballad.

“Subotica,” she replied.

My vision of a graceful raven-haired, dark-eyed Bosnian singer from Sarajevo had long since been dispelled. I shot out of my seat and moved swiftly to an empty space on the opposite side of the table. This was followed by a series of sharp gestures and growled commands by our host from the *Republički Komitet*. The singer quickly sat down next to the Ambassador of Venezuela, who greeted her mouth-to-ear style of crooning with a smile. The evening seemed to be saved.

After dinner we took the bus to our spa and were trouping to our cabins when the ambassador, despite his Panama lost his plenipotentiary power and shouted (in English) “Liberate me!” Turning, I saw the singer had his neck in a hammer lock as she whispered in his ear.

Duško Trifunović asked me what the diplomat was shouting. By luck or by indoctrination in *Partizan* lore I knew the word *osloboditi* (to free/liberate) and told him. He stuck his knuckles in the singer's face and shoved until she loosened her hammerlock. The ambassador scampered like a rabbit to his cabin, but the singer had seized his Panama hat. The *Republički* representative dislodged the hat while he and his aide dragged her to the bus. The last to be heard was a shout, "I will not return to Višegrad! I am the guest of the Venezuelan ambassador!"

Next morning at breakfast the official *Republički* host addressed me solemnly: "You deeply disappointed us last night, *Gospodin* Binder. That woman was for you."

Standing up. I replied, "You have deeply offended me." I replied. "Here in this beautiful land of Bosnia, here on this indescribably lovely green Bosnian river, beside this historic Bosnian bridge, you offer me a woman not from Bosnia but from Vojvodina!"

I caught the next bus to Valjevo.

* * *

Anniversaries of historic events have different meanings for different people. So it was with June 28, 1914 — the day the Austro-Hungarian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand and his consort were shot to death in a narrow street in Sarajevo, which precipitated the first world war.

Fifty years later a handful of foreign correspondents based in Belgrade journeyed to Sarajevo to relive the moment at 10 a.m. on a corner of what was in 1914 called *Appel Kej* along the right bank of the Miljačka River. Where we stood were footprints set in the cement sidewalk showing where Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb, stood waiting for the Archduke's car. A plaque on the wall commemorated the event. We were virtually alone.

"Wonder what the weather was like fifty years ago," I murmured.

"Hot" said Joe Peters, correspondent for McGraw Hill Publications.

"How do *you* know? I scoffed.

"I was there," said Joe, the former Josip Petrović who was born in Sarajevo in 1900 and was a schoolboy when the assassination occurred. "I heard the two shots," he said. "I ran to see."

Just one of the six members of the *Mlada Bosna* (Young Bosnia) group who waited on the parade route to attack the Archduke was in Sarajevo a half century later: Cvetko Popović, was then seventeen. He had not been close enough to fire his revolver or throw his bomb, he recalled:

"We were just kids then. We did not know what we were doing. We wanted only to destroy the Archduke, as a symbol of Austrian occupation and Germanization of our Bosnia. It was purely a protest, a strictly local affair. We did not think of war."

The vicissitudes of the site reflected the city's ambiguous relationship with its own past. In 1917, the Austro-Hungarians erected a giant monument at the assassination site. Some two years later it was ripped down by the new Serbian-led (proto- Yugoslav) government. A plaque commemorating Princip's deed was put up in 1930. It was torn down in 1941 by the victorious Wehrmacht and presented to Hitler on his 52nd birthday. After World War II a new plaque was placed on the Wall. In Cyrillic letters it read:

> From this place on 28 June of the year 1914 Gavrilo Princip expressed with his shots the people's protest against tyranny and the eternal striving of our people for liberty.

A Young Bosnia Museum was opened and the footprints where Princip stood on the sidewalk were embossed.

* * *

That plaque was evidently what a 19-year-old American student named Richard Holbrooke saw when he visited Sarajevo in the summer of 1960. But the way he recalled it in his 1998 book *To End a War* gave it an entirely different spin. In his prologue he writes:

> A guide appeared and offered to translate the words engraved in Serbian on the wall above the footprints. "Here on June 28, 1914. (the plaque read, or so I remembered it) Gavrilo Princip struck the first blow for Serbian liberty." I can still recall my astonishment. "Serbian liberty." What was this all about? I never forgot that first brush with extreme nationalism… It came back to me vividly when Yugoslavia fell apart.

As can be seen, Holbrooke got the plaque quotation wrong and then slapped his own erroneous interpretation on top of it to underscore his extremely one-sided interpretation of the causes of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

In 1992 the Muslim government of the newly truncated Bosnia of President Alija Izetbegović eliminated the plaque commemorating Princip's act, the Young Bosnia Museum — and his embossed sidewalk footprints, deeming them a detested sign of Serbian patriotism.

Later a more neutrally themed museum was opened on the site, and a new plaque stating simply that the Archduke and his wife were killed here. There was a plan to put back Princip's footsteps, but Muslim war veterans protested so loudly in 2008 that the plan was abandoned. Instead a plain wooden sign states in Serbian, English and the new "Bosnian" language: "May Peace Prevail on Earth."

* * *

In the spring of 1965 I drove then through Bosnia-Hercegovina from Belgrade on the way to the Adriatic coast city of Zadar. nowadays a journey of perhaps 7 hours, it took two full days then.

With me were Keith Morfett, correspondent for the London *Daily Mail* and Julia, my five-year-old daughter. We stopped in the town of Mostar, a city of perhaps 40,000, its name meaning "bridge keeper." Here was a stone bridge of surpassing beauty, erected in 1566, a geometrically thrilling single arch, in the same year the other, eleven-arch bridge across the Drina was begun but eleven years *before* the Drina structure was completed! The Mostar arch was built on the orders of Suleiman the Magnificent a century after the Ottoman armies conquered Bosnia. I was amazed to discover that the architect was Mimar Hayrudin, who had studied *under* the builder of the Drina span, Mimar Sinan.

Pausing on the high embankment above the rushing Neretva River we viewed the stunning bridge, a gently curving crescent below and a wide-angled peak above, in glowing limestone. Boys jumped from the parapet head first or feet first into the cold waters some seventy-five feet below as they had done for at least 300 years. Framing the bridge were mosques with their slender minarets. After dining in an elegant restaurant in the opening of a cavern on the west bank of the Neretva, we found lodging with a Muslim family who rented us a large second-floor room with a balcony on the east bank.

While Julia slumbered, Keith and I sat on the balcony in the warm spring evening gazing at the silhouette of the Mostar bridge while drinking a bottle of *Žilavka*, a local white wine prized for its nutty aroma, and one of Yugoslavia's few viable exports. All at once flames burst out of the top of a large trash can that stood next to the compound's tall wooden gate. The family's teen-aged daughter rushed forth with a bucket to try to douse it — a comely figure, clad in a transparent nightshift. "Look at the daughter!" I said to Keith." The flames increased. A second full-figured female ran out, also in a transparent nightshift, also carrying a bucket. "Look at the mother!" said Keith.

"Mostar is burning!" I declared.

Soon a fire engine appeared and doused the blaze.

Next day, as we drove on, Keith and I chuckled about the incident, unaware that a child in a back seat retains everything an adult says. For months afterward, Julia recounted the entire incident concluding with the cry "Mostar is burning!"

* * *

Although multi-ethnic Mostar[1] suffered heavy damage and human suffering almost from the beginning of the Bosnian conflict that began in April 1992, its bridge survived for a time. Initial clashed erupted between Serb-led army forces and the troops of the newly established Croatian Defense Council *(HVO)*. The Serb forces withdrew, but fighting now sharpened between Bosnian Muslim units on the eastern bank and Croats on the west.

Finally, in November 1993, Croatian tank shells destroyed the Mostar bridge — an eerie repetition of the destruction of the Ottoman bridge on the Drina by the Austrians in 1915.

In my early Yugoslav years, I met Isidor Papo, a renowned surgeon who had been a medical officer in Tito's Partizan brigades and who later won renown for performing some 4,000 open heart operations. He came from an ancient Sephardic family that settled in Hercegovina in the seventeenth century.

Dr. Papo was born in 1913 in Ljubuski, located on a tributary of the Neretva, some 20 miles west of where he attended school. Dozens of family were killed by the Croatian Fascist *Ustaši*. He identified himself strongly with Mostar. In recollection, a neighbor described him as "a very happy man," adding, "most dear to him were Mostar fish and ham." He added: "I was driving with him one day and as we approached Mostar we saw a donkey and he got out and rode into town."

In 1995 Dr. Papo and his wife, Roza (who also had a distinguished medical career) received me in their Belgrade apartment near the Kalemegdan fortress. On the wall was a large painting of Mostar, its ancient bridge in the center. As he began talking about the town his dark eyes brimmed with tears. He died a year later.

The rebuilding of the bridge, with some of its original stones recovered from the waters of the Neretva, was finished in 2004.

Bosnia had started life as a recognized entity in 1150 under the Slavic title *Ban* (lord). It was more or less independent until the Turks seized it as well as Hercegovina and ruled them until 1878.

While intermarriage was not rare after World War II, at no time in 800 years did Serbs, Croats and Muslims form a single people. Muslims were acknowledged as a "constituent nation" of the Federation in 1963 but only declared a distinct nation in 1968. All that happened under President Josip Broz Tito, the eternal tinkerer.

Tito had spent almost the entire war years in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where in November 1942, he convened the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia at Bihać, and then at

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1. Before World War II 30,000 Serbs lived in Mostar. Now there are 5,000.

Jajce had himself chosen president of a provisional government. He led Partizan forces in battle on the Neretva in 1943, was wounded in the next big clash at Sutjeska, and was nearly captured at Drvar in May 1944.

Every fourth inhabitant of Bosnia and Hercegovina was killed in World War II — many by fellow Bosnians.

In November 1983 (three years after the death of Tito), I returned to Bosnia as part of trip to report on Yugoslavia's prospects for the future. It was only a few months before the Winter Olympics opened in Sarajevo. The city seemed unusually somber and it was not just the weather.

A few months earlier twelve (of thirteen) Bosnians had been convicted of "hostile activity" and "hostile propaganda." Their crimes included "Moslem nationalism" and the demand that Bosnia and Hercegovina (at that time 40% Moslem, 40% Serbian and 20% Croatian) become a "pure Moslem republic." Chief among the defendants was a lawyer, Alija Izetbegović (from a family of *beys* in Bosanski Šamac). He had published a provocative treatise in 1970 entitled *The Islamic Declaration*.

Most striking was the statement: "There is no peace or coexistence between the Islamic faith and non-Islamic social and political institutions." In any case, prosecutors were "hypersensitive to this nationalism because this region was a slaughterhouse during the war," as Nijaz Duraković, a political science professor, said at the time. Probably the court was aware that Izetbegović (1926–2003) was the head organizer of a recruiting drive for the — all Muslim — Waffen SS 20,000-strong Handžar Division ("Handžar," derived from the Arabic word which means "dagger." They mostly fought Yugoslav Partizans, but some units were sent to the Russian front in autumn 1944).

Most of my Sarajevo days were spent in the company of Amira Kapetanović, head of the republic's information office. She was a thirty-eight-year-old divorcee who spoke excellent English and some German, a fairly tall red-head whose mood seemed to range between sour and sad.

Ten years later, I learned, she was attending peace negotiations with Alija Izetbegović. She became his third wife (under Shariah law) in 1995 when she was listed as his "adviser and interpreter," and later went on to be Bosnia's ambassador to Hungary and Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Australia and New Zealand. Her official photo shows her smiling.

As Yugoslavia's ethnic tensions sharpened, Bosnia, where they always lay close to the surface, was unable to avoid them. Including Duško Trifunović (1933–2006), whom I had met on the Drina raft. A poet, he considered himself a true Yugoslav. He had composed lyrics for the immensely popular rock group *Bijelo Dugme* (White Button). Including an ominously prophetic verse from 1988 that now seems almost archaic:

Sing Yugoslavia
Sing that you be heard
Those who don't listen to this song
Will hear the storm[2]

But it was another poem entitled *Snajper* written ten years earlier that caused him trouble:

Here's what happened
On the banks of a muddy stream
At the border
A man is in doubt
This is a hero
Who spiritedly sprints across a minefield
And now must go back the same way for a medal
And to jump into the stream
On the opposite bank
A sniper aims
At the weak spot of that treasured guest

Like a god his eye watched
Nothing can be hidden from it.

In summer 1992, the militant Bosnians in the new Sarajevo regime recalled the Trifunović verse and accused him of writing orders for Serbian snipers shooting at people in the streets of the Bosnian capital. He was forced to flee to Serbia after having lived in Bosnia his whole life

This reminded me of the writings of Ivo Andrić, born in Bosnia. Early in his career he dwelt on the special quality of hatred in Bosnia. In his *Letter from 1920*, about a man who fled Bosnia because of hatred, Andrić wrote:

"There are more people in Bosnia and Hercegovina who are ready for hatred, unconsciously, each with different sets of impulses and excuses, to kill and to be killed, than there are in countries ten times their size, Slavic or not."

Born in Travnik of Croatian parentage, Andrić is claimed by both Croatia and Bosnia as one of theirs. But he wrote in Serbian, lived in Serbia, became a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, married a Serbian woman and is buried in Serbia. A statue of Andrić in Višegrad

2. A paraphrase of a verse from a Branko Miljković poem, "Everyone will write poetry" from his last collection of poems, *The Origin of Hope* (Poreklo nade) (1960).

was blown up in 1992 by a Muslim who was hailed as a hero by the government of Alija Izetbegović (who had detested the author).

Meša Selimović (1910–1982), a Bosnian of Muslim origin, also chose to identify with Serbia, even though he was a descendant of a prominent family of Ottoman provincial governors (*beys*). He wrote in Serbian and was a member of the Serbian Academy. Selimović once wrote sarcastically of his native Bosnia that it was "a backwater too small to become a lake and too big to dry up."

Most recently, Emir Kusturica (1954–), the gifted Sarajevo-born film director and actor told me in 1993: "I never wanted an independent Bosnia. I wanted Yugoslavia. That is my country." At age 49 he declared that he was a Serb. He was baptized into the Serbian Orthodox Church with the name Nemanja, declaring: "My father was an atheist and he always described himself as a Serb. OK, maybe we were Muslim for 250 years, but we were Orthodox before that and deep down we were always Serbs. Religion cannot change that. We only became Muslims to survive the Turks."

MACEDONIA

The Convair 340 was packed with Macedonians anxious about their families and homes. In the cockpit, the JAT pilot dipped the nose down over the city and rolled the plane slightly to the starboard to give me an opportunity to snap pictures from the cockpit with my clumsy but reliable Rolleiflex: A first glimpse of devastated Skopje following the earthquake of July 26, 1963.

It was noontime, some seven hours after the great tremor struck.

"From the air Skopje looked as if it had been struck by a heavy bombing raid," I wrote in my first dispatch. "Gaping holes where roofs had been. A haze of brick and mortar dust hung over the city." The pilot was one of dozens of Yugoslavs who helped me that day and later to report the event — from the JAT personnel at Surčin who got me aboard the first civilian Skopje flight to Bora Čausev, the Macedonian secretary of home affairs who started the city's rescue and evacuation operations a mere twenty minutes after the initial shock. He had emergency experience with a huge flood of the Vardar river in Skopje eight months earlier. Čausev told me I was the first foreign journalist to arrive at the quake scene. But I was also a greenhorn with less than two months in the Balkans and one hundred words of Serbo-Croatian.

Yugoslavs seemed almost by instinct to realize that Skopje needed a lot of help and including help from abroad.

Most striking was the extraordinary silence and seeming purposefulness of people walking amid the shattered buildings and crazily slanted lamp poles, some of them pushing wooden barrows loaded with bedding and other household belongings. Bora Čausev said there was an initial moment of panic with crowds running headlong through the streets, but soon calm prevailed. Thanks in part to his efforts, thousands of People's Army soldiers, firemen, policemen and health workers were summoned to Skopje to assist.

The temperature under the cloudless skies was in the high 90s. Initially there were strong fears of an outbreak of typhus. Numerous water trucks provided relief. They were mobbed by thirsty citizens as soon as they stopped. Excavating machines and brigades of men with shovels and picks were deployed to the hotels Makedonija and Skopje, where scores of guests lay pinned alive under rubble and others were already dead.

It was easy to gather material for a report on the quake. The difficulty lay in finding a way to transmit a dispatch. Telephone and telegraph lines were down and the Skopje radio station was a shambles. The nearest functioning phone line appeared to be in Kumanovo, 26 miles to the east. I

hitched a ride and walked to the Post Office, where I tapped a report on my sky blue 8.6 lb. Hermes typewriter and queued up at the counter for telephone calls. It was after dark when I got through to Mirjana Komarečki, my Belgrade office manager, and dictated the dispatch to her for transmission by telex to New York. I also told her to be on the watch for a roll of film from the Rolleiflex, which a Belgrade colleague would bring to her. The first day story got through for the first edition printed that night.

To my astonishment everything functioned smoothly amid the chaos and, in *The Sunday New York Times* of July 29, five of the Skopje photos from the film roll were printed.

* * *

It dawned on me that the Skopje earthquake, though relatively small in terms of death toll (1,070), had become a major international event. A sign perhaps of Yugoslavia's peculiar nature, perched precariously between East and West, but siding with neither.

That morning, George F. Kennan, on his last day of ambassadorship to Yugoslavia, donated a pint of blood to aid victims. Lawrence (Larry) Eagleburger, then a junior officer, having drawn the weekend duty at the American Embassy in Belgrade, succeeded by telephone(s) to get the U.S. Army to fly its Eighth Evacuation Field Hospital with 200 physicians and nurses from Ramstein, Germany to a site near Kumanovo. They started work three days after the quake. (Eagleburger, himself later an ambassador to Yugoslavia, was dubbed "Lawrence of Macedonia" by colleagues — parallel to the soubriquet of T.E. "Lawrence of Arabia").

Major international contributions came as well from Britain, Sweden, France, the Soviet Union and many other countries.

How to explain this powerful resonance? Without delving into psychology, sociology or even history I guess one reason is that earthquakes strike relatively seldom in the center of cities — although the population of Skopje then was a modest 170,000. There was also a certain romantic notion attached to "Macedonia," whether related to a fruit salad recipe, Alexander the Great or to revolutionary terrorism.

Before the quake Yugoslavia's claim on Macedonia was strongly and loudly disputed in neighboring Greece and Bulgaria. Afterward, those voices were more muted. In any case, the quake put Macedonia on the map of international consciousness in a sympathetic fashion that no political act could have accomplished.

The next day, President Tito arrived in mid-morning with a huge entourage — in fact most of the members of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav League of Communists. Driving with Emile ("Guiko") Guikovaty of *Agence France Presse*, who had motored down from Belgrade, we were wedged into the Tito convoy at the airport. Immediately, we were forced by motorcycle escorts to stay among the official cars through the city, the convoy stalling even rescue vehicles for over an hour as crowds gazed silently at the spectacle. Finally, we drove up the Kale Fortress hill. On the grassy plateau, a huge tent had been erected above linen-covered tables sumptuously laden with food and beverages. Tito, in a sky blue air force uniform, sat at the head table.

When everyone was seated, Guiko, facing Tito who was about 40 feet away, piped up in English: "What are you doing to save my countrymen trapped in the Hotel Macedonia?"

"And what about those in the Hotel Skopje?" I added.

Red-faced, Tito turned and barked, "What are these foreigners doing here? This is a Central Committee meeting!"

A uniformed military officer came up and politely suggested we join him on the sidelines away from the huge tent. He introduced himself in good English as Gojko Nikolis, commander of the army medical corps and offered to answer our questions.

How many dead so far?

"So far, 500 bodies," he softly replied.

How many might there still be?

"About 500 more are known to be in the rubble." (The Nikolis estimates were astonishingly close to the final quake death toll! Only much later did I learn that Nikolis, then 52, was not only a distinguished author, but also Partizan hero and an International Brigade veteran of the Spanish Civil War.)

Less than a month later, I and many other foreign correspondents returned to the stricken city following Nikita Khrushchev's epic tour of Yugoslavia, from Macedonia to Slovenia. He and his wife Nina, accompanied by Tito and Jovanka Broz, solemnly walked several blocks among ruined buildings.

Having moved ahead, I found members of a Soviet Army engineering brigade lounging on their vehicles, smoking and drinking from bottles. At a signal they grabbed shovels and began digging. Jovanka Broz came up to the commander and, as television cameras whirred, asked him if the work was difficult. "It is hard," the colonel replied. "But the life of the people is harder!"

Scripted in Skopje, not Hollywood, but the dialogue could not have been better.

The problem with Macedonia, it seemed, is that Macedonia has always been a problem. Throughout the entire twentieth century and going strong into the second decade of the twenty-first century, no other territorial-nomenclature-identity issue can match that of Macedonia. Not Cyprus, not Kosovo, not Kashmir, nor the Kuril Islands.

Macedonia, with frontiers bordering Albania, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria, has been subject to territorial claims from three of these four neighbors and has itself made claims to territories in southwestern Bulgaria and northwestern Greece (where Macedonian-speaking minorities still reside — 40,000 in Greece, 5–10,000 in Bulgaria).

The problem started during the last years of the declining Ottoman Empire as fresh revolutionary movements sprang up. In this case, lacking any historical Slavic designation for the region whatsoever one plainly South Slavic group decided to call itself the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

This was abbreviated VMRO in its original Slavic form in 1893 when it was founded in the port city of Thessaloniki — *Solun* to Slavs. With bombs, guns and a trademark pattern of assassination of political opponents it rapidly became an international synonym for terrorism. Its aims were obscured by a practice of extreme secrecy. Its early leaders appeared to waver between creating a greater Bulgaria — meaning the acquisition of additional territory considered "Macedonian" or an independent Macedonia.

VMRO's practice of political assassination thrived in the interwar period as it had before World War I. VMRO played a substantial role — together with army officers — in the 1923 killing of Bulgaria's Prime Minister Aleksandar Stambuliyski in his home town as revenge for his making peace with Serbia and Greece. His right hand, which signed the Treaty of Niš with Serbia, was sliced off. His head was sent to Sofia in a biscuit box.

In 1934, Vlado Chernozemski, a practiced VMRO assassin, killed the Serbian King Alekasandar I and caused the death of the French foreign minister, Louis Barthou in Marseille. That same year, Bulgarian security forces discovered an VMRO arms cache of hundreds of guns and 701,388 cartridges in the Petrich district near the Greek and Macedonian frontiers.

Oddly, VMRO still lingers on as a designation of political groupings in both Macedonia and Bulgaria (but apparently shunning the former custom of assassinating opponents).

A new issue arose with the breakup of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991. As Yugoslavia's six (now seven) constituent republics began declaring themselves sovereign,

independent states, Macedonia was warned by Greece that it could not call itself simply "Macedonia."

"Macedonia" was after all the name of the ancient tribe of Makednoi (meaning tall in Greek) and was a proud part of history by way of Philip and Alexander of Macedon. In modern times (beginning in the nineteenth century) "Macedonia" remained the Greek designation for the region.

All Athens would accept was the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" or FYROM. Otherwise Greece would block the Skopje government's accession to the European Union. The Skopje government continues to stick its thumb in the Greek eye — by naming its airfield Alexander the Great Airport, by erecting a forty-foot equestrian statue namelessly entitled "Warrior on a Horse" (but with Alexander's facial features), in the capital's main square and, since 1995, by displaying a national flag with the ancient Greek symbol of the Vergina sun, with golden rays on a red background.

* * *

That was the Greek side of the Macedonia issue. The Bulgarian side was equally burdened by history, including the fact that the first Bulgarian empire stretched from the Black Sea to the Adriatic in the ninth century, a vast magnitude that was still vividly taught in Bulgarian schools in the twentieth century

Immediately after World War II — during which fascist Bulgaria annexed the western Macedonian territories for three years — the victorious Yugoslav Partizans, after having created the first Macedonian republic, decreed that the "ov" ending of many patronymics be changed to "ski". This made a Popov, for instance, a Popovski. In some villages this practice was carried further even to the ridiculous point of changing names chiseled on gravestones.

Meanwhile, linguists in Skopje busied themselves expanding a standard Macedonian vocabulary, which had started life in 1945 with 30,000 words. In 1965 the Institute for Macedonian Language declared on the twentieth anniversary of the country that there were now 70,000 words in use by the country's 1.7 million citizens.

In autumn 1966, Sofia's man in Belgrade, Ambassador Grudi Atanasov, dispatched a team of embassy officers to Yugoslavia's southernmost republic to "study conditions for creation of a separate Macedonian socialist republic under Bulgarian guidance." They were tracked every inch of the way by the Yugoslav secret police. Although they reported back to Atanasov that "no conditions

existed" for such a change, the undertaking stirred Belgrade to make a diplomatic protest and to expose it in the Yugoslav press.

About the same time, a group of Macedonian writers walked out of a conference of Slavic writers in Sofia when the Bulgarian hosts refused to acknowledge Macedonian as a separate language.

Some months after we settled in Belgrade there was a knock on the door at our home in Proleterskih Brigada. A middle-aged man introduced himself as a professional colleague of my father-in-law, a veterinarian whom he had recently visited in East Germany. He himself was a veterinarian from Bulgaria and had just come from visiting relatives in Macedonia — a relatively rare occasion, given the animosity in those days between Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia and Todor Zhivkov's. I invited him in for lunch. Burning with curiosity, asked him how he found the Macedonians.

Glancing around nervously (a universal Balkan cautionary habit in those days) he murmured, "No, politics, please."

"But I just want to hear your impression of Macedonians, not their politics."

Still glancing around, he said: "Well there are some Macedonians who hate Bulgars. And there some Macedonians who hate Serbs. Some Macedonians hate Greeks. And some Macedonians hate Albanians. But (pause for emphasis), there are no Macedonians who hate nobody."

Well, not all Macedonians. In 1965 I picked up a young hitchhiker near the 3,000 foot Babuna Pass south of Skopje. I asked his nationality and he replied with a sunny smile, "My father is Bulgarian and my mother is Greek. But I am Macedonian."

* * *

Then there is the odd — or maybe not so odd — case of Kiro Gligorov (1917–) the first president of independent Macedonia. He was born into a prosperous Macedonia-minded family in the town of Štip, graduated from Belgrade University's law school and began work in a Skopje bank before war broke out. Here his story takes several paths. In the official version he joined the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Movement in 1941, soon after the Axis occupation of (monarchial) Yugoslavia.

But in research of his life for an obituary, another version emerged: that when the Bulgarian occupation authorities took over, young Kiro went to work for the Bulgarian National Bank and may even have acquired Bulgarian citizenship. In any case when the Bulgarians departed in August 1944, Gligorov emerged on the winning side. I met him when he was Secretary of State for Finance in

Josip Broz's Tito's Federal Executive Council, which was roughly the equivalent of a U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.

* * *

Gligorov began his eight-year term as Macedonia's president in 1991, earning plaudits from American and European officials for his exemplary conduct in office — in sharp contrast to nearly all of the newly minted national leaders of the other ex-Yugoslav republics. He even won some acceptance from Greece for acknowledging in a 1992 televised interview that, "We are all Slavs, who came here in the sixth century. We are not descendants of the ancient Macedonians."

Then on October 3, 1995 a car bomb exploded near his presidential limousine, blinding Gligorov's right eye and killing his chauffeur. Assassins were back in the Macedonia action (although this time nobody mentioned VMRO). No perpetrators were ever identified.

Perhaps Macedonia is a generational problem.

As an example of the older generation, I was at a 1978 diplomatic cocktail party in Washington, D.C. attended by both Yugoslavia's fiercely Macedonian Ambassador Dimče Belovski (1923–2010) — and Bulgaria's Ambassador Lyubomir Popov (1918–2005). Conversation moved along harmoniously until a question was posed to both men by an American businessman:

"I just returned from a trip to Sofia and Skopje. In Sofia I met with a state enterprise director named Blagoj Popov and, a few days later in Skopje I was introduced to an official in the ministry of agriculture named Blagoj Popov. Could they be from the same family?"

"They could be," replied the gentlemanly Bulgarian diplomat.

"No, no," said the quarrelsome Belovski. "They are not the same. In Macedonian the name is pronounced Pop-OV."

But now young Macedonians flock to Bulgarian universities and some acquired Bulgarian citizenship papers — easily granted — so that they could travel more easily to European Union countries. Bulgaria was admitted to the EU in 2007.

Macedonia is still waiting to be officially deemed "European" (a word that originates from the name of the goddess Europa in Greek mythology).

VLACHS

Soon after I arrived in the Balkans, Mirijana Komarečki, my stalwart secretary-translator-office manager read in a newspaper that the rites of the Vlach people, including women falling into trances and talking to the dead would be marked June 5 — at the time of Pentecost — in the eastern Serbian town of *Duboka* ("deep" in Serbian).

The only trance woman I had previously heard about was Al Capp's memorable "Mammy Yokum." So this struck me as worth exploring. I had never heard of Vlachs. Mirijana found me an interpreter who was an instructor at Belgrade University, a tall slender man who became rather skittish once outside the city limits. As the crow flies, the distance from Belgrade to Duboka is less than 100 kilometers, but the roads in those days made it seem twice as far and took nearly four hours. The plan was to view ancient memorial rites called *Pomana*, as practiced by the Vlachs of Homolje.

The day was cool with showers followed intermittently by sunshine. Passing thick groves of beech, oak and ash as we neared the village, the road crossed rickety bridges above rushing creeks. Until the last swift stream. Too late. A dozen logs were missing from the bridge across the freshet on the edge of Duboka, probably washed out by high waters. The big Steyr-Fiat hit the gap and sank nose first into the currents, drowning the motor. Villagers gathered on the bank, jaws dropping in wonderment. A young man stepped forward announcing himself as the mayor.

"Why didn't you have a sign saying the bridge was impassable?" I asked.

"But we know the bridge is gone!" he replied with a logic that was irrefutable.

Then, making amends, he not only organized a team of oxen to pull the dead station wagon out of the stream, but also invited us to lunch. Lunch was more like a feast, with seven courses — from soup to cakes for dessert.

I ventured a few questions to our host:

"Are you a Marxist?"

"Well sort of."

"Do you believe that these trance women can talk to the dead?"

"It is better not to disbelieve."

"Do you know any of these trance women?"

"One of them is my mother."

Pointing to the woman serving the meal, I responded, “Please tell your mother that the lunch was splendid!”

“That is my wife.”

We walked slowly around the town of 700 or so inhabitants. Memorial stones in the graveyard were decorated with flowers and small mirrors, some with small cakes, flasks of liquor, bottles of water. The dead, it was explained, had not eaten, or washed, for a long time. In the town square young men in tall, conical, white woolen hats, sleeveless embroidered jackets, and shiny knives, garlic sprigs around their necks were dancing with girls wearing brightly colored kerchiefs. A slow two-step to a “kolo” tune played by two violinists. In the center, an elderly woman spun slowly until her eyes rolled back. She crumpled to the ground, softly murmuring.

Villagers entreated her to talk to their dead relatives, saying to her as if she were their intermediary, “We want to speak to you. We want you to eat lunch and dinner. Here is water. Speak to us.” Then silence. Relatives of the trance woman brought water from the stream and poured it on her head to revive her. This was indeed one of the Vlach trance women of the Homolje region. (Sometimes, we were told, it took a pistol shot next to her head to bring a trance woman back from the dead.) At this ceremony, so far from urban life, there was a very tall young woman in a modern skirt, blouse and sensible shoes, taking notes. Plainly not a Vlach. She introduced herself as Marian Wenzel (1932–2002), a thirty-one-year-old ethnographer from Pittsburgh. (Her remarkable research exposed bogus historical claims on the origins of decorated Bosnian tombstones by tracing them instead to itinerant Vlach herdsmen. I was happy to publish a report about her discoveries.) The festival continued into the night with the music growing louder as drums, an accordion, horns and flutes were added. Sleep in the inn was sporadic, especially when shots were fired. At dawn the interpreter tugged my arm. “Can we return to Belgrade now?” he pleaded. “This makes me jumpy.” We went back to the car and drove west. The big Steyr, built by presumably sturdy Austrians, turned out to be as fragile as a kite. It was never the same after attending a *Pomana.* I wrote about the visit for *The New York Times*. The article was edited, dated June 8, 1963 and put in a column of type. But it was never published, becoming instead “overset” — the term for an unused story. The foreign editor sent me a copy on a sheet of newsprint. The back side was blank. It is now a yellowing strip of paper in a scrapbook. However, that first exposure to Vlachs stayed with me and I kept encountering signs of Vlachs in unexpected places: One commonality about Southeastern Europe, or the “Balkan Peninsula” as it was called in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: there were people called Vlachs everywhere in cities, towns, plains, even on mountains. They were scattered about as no other people

— with different names: Rumani, Arumani (as Vlachs called themselves), Koutsovlachos (Greek), Choban (Albanian), Tsintsar or Valach or Wallach (Romanian), Vlasi (Slavic), Karagouni (Turkish). It took me a long time, but I now think that some of the rural Vlachs I encountered in Southeastern Europe were not directly related to urban Vlachs I encountered later. They might have been *Welsch* (German for "foreign," that is, "not Germanic") or Wallachian? — from the southeastern region of Romania.

One day I met Nicholas Chiacu, a language instructor at the U.S. States Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Va., who had taught a generation of American diplomats the rudiments of Romanian. But he called himself a Vlach. He was a flaming patriot and, when he learned that I had a passing interest in Vlachs, he fixed me with a powerful black-eyed stare and confided his secret discovery: "I have studied the names of the members of the Central Committee of the Albanian Party of Labor (as the Communists called themselves) and one-third of them are Vlachs. Their names are Vlach!" Then he triumphantly reeled off a dozen or so names. No question, Vlachs had inhabited Albanian lands for centuries. By dint of their commercial skills they had built one of the largest urban centers in the Balkans: Moscopole (now called Voskopoje in Albanian) was a metropolis by the early 1700s with a population of at least 35,000 — only to be raided, pillaged and driven away by Albanian bandits between 1769 and 1788.

It occurred to me that in all my time in Southeastern Europe I had never heard a bad word about Vlachs. About other minorities? Yes! Here or there Gypsies, Pomoks, Turks, Tartars and Slavic Old Believers were despised and deplored here and there. But never Vlachs. Their origins apparently traced back to the first Roman colonies in Greece around Preveza on the Adriatic coast in the Epirus region in 146 BC. The colonies lasted until the sixth century.

After Duboka, my occasional brushes with Vlachdom included the ancient Vlach Church (Vlach's were traditionally members of the Eastern Orthodox faith) in Cetinje, once capital of Montenegro, along with toponyms of Montenegrin mountains, Visitor and Durmitor, and the Bosnian peak, Romanija. Then I read the remarkable work of two English scholars, Alan J. Wace and Maurice Thompson — who, like a number of other slightly mad Englishmen — and women — explored what in those days, they called "The Near East." A territory as remote and romantic for northern Europeans as the Wild West. In their travels in northern Greece, 1909–1910, they visited the Vlach village of Samarina high in the Pindus mountains where the people still spoke a Latin language in a region where the high tide of the Roman empire had receded fifteen centuries before their arrival. (The Romans themselves had never appealed to me with their lifeless art and architecture.) In 1913,

Wace and Thompson published *Nomads of the Balkans*. It recounted a Vlach folktale which began: *Shi eara nu shi eara* — "then there was what was not... Almighty God, when he made the world, dropped one of his four sacks of lies on Samarina and they ran downhill to other parts of the world."

The idea of encountering vestiges of an ancient empire emerging before me in the customs, costumes, music, food and language — admixed with two millennia of Greek, Slavic, Turkish, Dacian and Illyrian *hors d'oeuvres* and sweetmeats — with a tongue deriving from Miss Frances Hoyle's Latin class in George School…Where else could you get a sense of what life might have been like before Christianity and Coca Cola? I had to go there.

So in 1976, during a family vacation in Greece, I persuaded my wife Helga and daughters Andrea and Alena to accompany me up the Pindus slopes in a small rental car — with a poor map as our guide. We had already heard Vlach spoken lower down in the market town of Grevena. "It's just a few kilometers to Samarina," one townsman said. We wound our way up and up ever narrowing roads until we hit a dirt track slushy from recent rains. Tall stands of pine and oak lined the hillsides. Then 8,000-foot peaks came into view with touches of snow in the northern crevasses. Lush meadows curved away in front of us and on the verges wildflowers sprang out pink, pale yellow, white, blue — foxglove, primroses, cowslips, gentians. No wonder the transhumant Vlachs herded their sheep and goats this way in the verdant summers when the rest of Greece was baking like a brick in the south European oven. We came to an abrupt halt at the edge of a torrent so swollen by the rains that it had washed away the road, creating an impassable gravelly gulch. At my urging, we dismounted from our 60 powers of horse and set out *imnandalui* "on foot," as the Vlachs call it, fording the torrent and continuing along the curving path, the daughters in beach sandals. No Vlach in sight. Nor sheep nor goats. After an hour a grizzled man appeared leading a donkey. For a few drachma he allowed the daughters to ride a ways. Samarina was "very close," he vowed. Not by a country mile. The daughters tired of the obstreperous beast, who seemed to want to go everywhere but on the path. The shepherd and the erstwhile steed headed into a meadow. We stuck to the path. All at once a big pickup truck rumbled up. "Samarina?" we inquired as the driver stopped for our waving arms. He motioned for us to hop in. The young god resembled Omar Sharif, my wife observed approvingly. He was, he explained, in search of antiques to buy and then to sell, and the Vlach villages had plenty, from the festive *duluma* frock coat of a woman with its needlework braiding and rows of oval silver buttons to the simple homemade jackknife called *custura* with its handle carved from the horn of a baby goat.

All at once we were splashing through another swollen stream and Samarina rose up before us, a gathering of tin-roofed houses surmounted by a church with a pine tree growing out of its roof. At an altitude of 5,413 feet it was said to be the highest village in Greece. If Christ had gotten this far, I thought, he would have stopped here. We climbed down to the center of the town square of the capital of the Vlachs, marked by a large desiccated willow oak and faced at various angles by seven taverns. Famished, we settled in the cleanest looking establishment and were soon served fresh bread, sheep cheese, ripe tomatoes and a bottled orange drink.

As we were munching on our makeshift sandwiches, seven men approached our table on the veranda, undoubtedly the village elders. There were no women in sight. The man with the biggest nose spoke: "Who were we? Where did we come from? What did we want? America? What do you think of Henry Kissinger?"

"He is a very wise man," I replied and, hoping to turn the conversation around, inquired, "Why do you ask?"

"Up here we think he is the devil," the largest nose replied.

"Why?"

"Because he has blue eyes," said the nose.

"But what has Kissinger ever done to the Vlachs?" I asked.

"Never mind," said the nose, turning and walking away with his entourage. (Much later I earned that Samarina Vlachs were notably pro-Greek, and the Greeks were notably anti-Kissinger because of he did not back Athens on the issue of divided Cyprus.) What was it a Vlach had said? "When you live in the mountains, they have to come to you to talk to you."

As soon as the elders left, their place was taken by shaven-headed boys, a dozen or so, squirting us with water pistols and tossing pebbles. We got up and went to Samarina's general store across the square. There we purchased a bagful of sticky jawbreakers and, as a souvenir, a tall shepherd's crook stained lemon yellow. Called a *glitsa*, it had a peculiar handle, shaped like a dying ballerina, but comfortable to grip. The design was probably as ancient as the Vlach people. Back in the square, the young man who resembled Omar Sharif, after having successfully plundered Samarina, offered us a lift on a back road to our stranded car. Squirted and pelted by the youth of Samarina, we climbed aboard. The daughters, ten and twelve, responded ingeniously by pelting back the attackers with bonbons, which soon had them scrambling for sweets.

That was it, for the time being.

Later, with my home in Washington, D.C., I returned to Southeastern Europe sometimes to report specific events and sometimes just poking around. I learned along the way that Vlachs had attained high office here and there — Foreign Minister Koča Popović (1908–1992) of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Fan Noli (1882–1965) of Albania, and Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis (1773–1847) of Greece.

But not alone in politics. Some of Romania's greatest writers and thinkers are considered at least partly Vlach, in origin: the poet-philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) and the playwright, Ion Luca Caragiale (1852–1912). He, like the famed Austrian orchestra conductor, Herbert von Karajan, came from Macedonian-Vlach families.

Similarly, in Serbia, Vlach families produced two great playwrights — Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–1856) and Branislav Nušić (1864–1938). Finally, the distinguished Serbian novelist, Borislav Pekić (1932–1992) was of Vlach descent and wrote his last great work, the seven-volume *Golden Fleece*, about a Vlach family, the Njegovans. It traces them from World War II back through history to the Argonauts of Greek mythology led by the noble Jason on a quest for the fleece of gold that represents his lost kingdom. Nor was the *Golden Fleece* his only Vlach story. His *Hodočašče Arsenija Njegovana* (*Houses of Belgrade* — 1970) makes an aged Belgrade Vlach its protagonist.

Somewhere along the way, Vlachs living among Serbs and further to the South among Macedonians, acquired the nickname "Tsintsar" — most likely an onomatopoetic fashion of imitating typically sibilant sounds of Vlach speech: *fatsa* ("face"); *fatsi* ("make"); *tsi* (what). In Macedonian and Serbian today, *tsintsar* is slang for "tightwad". I was introduced to Pekić's vast work by Bogdan Rakić, who translated some of Pekić's fiction and who described the theme of *Houses of Belgrade* as "the will to possess." That of course is also the theme of Pekić's *Golden Fleece*.

In another context, Tom J. Winnifrith, an indefatigable chronicler of Vlachs, wrote, "the Vlachs are the perfect Balkan citizens, able to preserve their culture without resorting to war or politics, violence or dishonesty." Echoing Pekić's theme that Vlachs like to wander, Winnifrith also wrote of this people: " It is difficult to find many traces of permanent settlement lasting more than three hundred years."

Having done a lot of wandering, I found this trait appealing.

SLOVENIA

My initial impression of Slovenia came in the village of Brdo at a stately mansion, built in the sixteenth century by a nobleman, that became the royal summer residence of Prince Paul of Yugoslavia in 1935. It was confiscated by the (half-Slovenian) Communist Josip Broz Tito after his victorious Partisans seized power in Yugoslavia in 1945. He spent the hottest summer months there or at another formerly royal villa at the nearby Lake Bled. In fact Tito had 32 official residences around the country – including the White Palace of the Karadjordje kings in Belgrade and the Adriatic summer palace he had built at Brioni. As Milovan Djilas, once his close Partizan comrade and later his most famous prisoner, observed in his biography, Tito had a "predilection for palaces" — and pomp and medals.

The occasion for the visit to Brdo on August 11, 1963 was Tito's reception for Orville L. Freeman, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. He was on a marathon trip from Moscow to Warsaw to Sofia to Belgrade, bringing with him a present of $25 million in aid for the Macedonian capital of Skopje, which had been struck by a massive earthquake less than three weeks before. I flew with him from Belgrade in the ancient DC-3 of the American air attaché — permission for the posting of the plane at Surcin Airport having been a grudging concession by the Communist government in return for munificent U.S. gifts in 1951-1953 of military equipment including Republic F-84 Thunderjet fighter-bombers and Lockheed T-33 jet trainers.

"Nice little spread you've got here, Marshal Tito!" said Freeman. The Yugoslav leader was nonplussed by the idiom of the Minnesota prairie, where his guest grew up, despite having acquired a fair amount of English, and needed a minute or so of interpretation. Then he heartily thanked his guest for the American aid. (Brdo was where Tito had a fatal stroke in 1980 and died soon after at the age of eighty-seven.)

The most prominent Slovene of the day was Edvard Kardelj[3] (1910–1979), a dour, pedantic type who studied to become a schoolteacher but joined the Communist party at age sixteen and devoted the rest of his life to the movement.

Milovan Djilas the Montenegrin intellectual in his epic, *Wartime* (1977), recalled visiting Slovenia in 1943 when Partisans had liberated most of Slovenia and were thinking about an independent Slovenia — the first in a thousand years. Djilas wrote: "The cult was Slovenia itself, a unanimous surge toward statehood."

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[3]. My colleague Davor Glavaš, a Croat-Slovene, found a Partizan leaflet in his Slovenian grandfather's home signed by Kardelj in 1944 saying, "our goal is an independent Slovenia as part of a south Slavic union of equal nations."

Little wonder! The Axis powers had sliced up defenseless Slovenia into three chunks. Germany, now including what Hitler now called the *Ostmark* (Austria), took the largest portion, in the middle; Fascist Italy got the west and Fascist Hungary got a piece in the northeast.

Djilas noted that Slovenian Partisans had just captured Turjak Castle from the collaborationist Slovenian White Guards and subsequently executed 700 prisoners (and later 11,000 more!).

Djilas to Kardelj: "But why did you have to kill them all?"

Kardelj to Djilas, with a superior smile: "That ought to demoralize them!"

While in Slovenia, Djilas, the intellectual, also made the acquaintance of Edvard Kocbek (1904–1981), who became his nation's most acclaimed poet. Despite considering himself a Christian Socialist, Kocbek joined the Slovenian Partisan movement and served as vice president of the (Communist-dominated) Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia. Djilas noted that Kocbek "preserved his own spiritual core probably because he was intellectually and metaphysically religious."

Kocbek published some stories in 1951 critical of Partisan behavior and was bitterly assailed by Kardelj's party and barred from publishing for a dozen years. This experience was reflected in verses entitled "Freedom of the Mind" published after 1964 in which the poet says no and no again.

> I grow hoarse amid the din of machines
> from mountain to mountain – nine echoes of: no;
> my neighbor hears it as: yes

For most of the remaining fourteen years of his life. Edvard Kardelj was widely regarded as the natural successor of President Tito. But that was always a ridiculous supposition — a man from Yugoslavia's smallest nation and perceived as utterly uninspiring? He also had no cadres in the ruling party aside from a handful of Slovenes. No, a man of the stature Tito had created for himself — president for life — could not have a successor. In fact in 1974 he designed — with Kardelj's help — a constitution that stipulated he would be succeeded by a *rotating* (!) presidency of eight members representing the six federal republics and the two autonomous regions.

At Ljubljana University's Kardelj Faculty of Law (its namesake never reached a university), I met professor Ivan Kristan and asked him about *rotacija*. He smiled as he responded: "Many functions are performed by people who made the revolution and they cannot be easily moved. We don't have enough means to make failures resign. Somebody intervenes to cover up."

A little later on a bus a member of a Slovenian soccer team gave me his take on the role of Partisans: "The old fighters, they were good at fighting, but they can't run an economy. They just

give orders. But you can't command an economy." I could not tell if he was deliberately mocking the Yugoslav system which, by definition, included a "command economy" in which the means of production are owned and directed by the state.

As separatism grew in the decade following Tito's death — initially in Slovenia, then in Croatia — the post-Tito presidency fell to pieces.

Then and later, Slovenes were caught in a fundamental contradiction: They never would have achieved liberation from foreign overlords (in 1918 and again in 1945) without the support and sacrifice of their Slavic neighbors — Serbia and Croatia. Yet their inclusion in the natural kinship of a South Slav federation worked to the economic disadvantage of most Slovenes. My Swiss colleague Viktor Meier captured this grotesque imbalance in a prescient study of "Yugoslav Communism" written in 1964, in which he described how Slovenia was obliged to turn over almost half of its income to the federal budget. That was more than twice the percentage of Serbia's contribution to the Belgrade government.

In other words, Slovenia was being milked in the name of federal Yugoslavia. Already Kardelj was being called a "Belgrade Slovene" by fellow Slovenes. Two decades later Slovenia — population 1.9 million or 8% of all Yugoslavia, created 22% of the country's revenue and 25% of its exports.

My first longer stay in Slovenia was in autumn 1983. I went for a week in Ljubljana, the well maintained capital, with a population then of 303,000. In its setting of the foothills of the Julian Alps, there was a certain loftiness in the attitude toward Balkan lowlanders to the south and east (although the heights of Montenegro, and some Montenegrins, exceeded those in Slovenia).

Still it was a bit of a surprise when my hosts suggested that it would make a good impression if I were to join hundreds of Slovenes in the annual national climbing of Triglav ("three heads") — at 9,396 feet the nation's highest mountain. Climbing gear would be supplied. As instructed, I arose early in the old Hotel *Slon* (Elephant), donned heavy trousers, boots and a parka and stood outside at the curb at 5 a.m. in a heavy rain. A young Slovene pulled up and announced: "The rainfall is very heavy. It would be dangerous to climb. But we are glad to see you were ready!"

I then visited with Jaka Stular (1925–1993), at *Delo*, Slovenia's leading daily paper, where he was a senior editor. He said that he had feared for Yugoslavia three times: in 1948 when Stalin expelled the country from the Soviet Bloc; two decades later when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia; and "now." He went on: "We are in the midst of an economic crisis and the basis for the economic crisis is a political crisis. A slender man in tweeds with thin moustache, he could have passed for English

barrister. In present day Yugoslavia there was “no punishment for failure,” he said. “I don’t mean jail, but free elections to get rid of those who fail.” He didn’t say the word but Jaka was alluding to the system of *rotacija* (“rotation”) instituted by Tito and Kardelj by way of Yugoslavia’s 1963 Constitution to ensure that nobody in a party or government position accumulated too much power by staying in office too long. In other words a failure was not penalized, just ignored. The 1974 Constitution was “a good document,” Jaka said, “but it is frustrated by local centers of power.”

His observation that Yugoslavia had unemployment of over 12 percent, among other economic woes, such as a lack of a common market among the republics, stirred his colleague, Marjan Sedmak, to say, “Jaka, we don’t even have the market, much less the common!” (This came as a shock because I had seen many Slovenian products in Serbian stores!)

The two journalists then put me in touch with a Slovene intellectual who had been an active Partisan. In a reflective tone he remarked: “The founding fathers bred two or three generations of mediocrities. This country is bursting with talent. But the talents aren’t running things. Instead there are hundreds of little dictatorships perpetuating themselves. We have receded.” This skepticism spread more widely and deeply in the next decade.

On later occasions I met the two Communists who pushed Slovenia out of Yugoslavia: stubby Milan Kučan (1941–) the first president in Ljubljana and lanky Janez Drnovsek (1950-2008) who became prime minister and later president. (Both struck me as exceptionally pleased with themselves.)

Facing the enormous centripetal pressure of the hitherto dominant Serbian Communists, Kucan, leader of the Yugoslav party’s centrifugal forces from his position as the top Slovenian, finally saw no recourse but to walk out of a meeting of the ruling League of Communists on January 23, 1990. Still, Kucan, who had been sheltered in Serbia from Nazi persecution — along with 58,000 other Slovenes — retained sympathies for Serbs. He tried for several months to preserve his republic’s participation in a loose Yugoslav confederation. Centralist Serbs rejected that.

The Slovene walkout led to the collapse of the ruling party, followed by the swift disintegration of the Yugoslavia that Tito had fathered forty-five years before. That may have seemed astonishing. But the collapse of Communist parties and governments was the theme of the moment throughout Europe in 1990.

I encountered an astonishing rethinking of the little country’s fundamental problems in January 1993 when Ljubo Sirc (1920–), a native of Kranj who had gone into exile after World War II published a devastating critique of the political situation in Slovenia.

A man of impeccable credentials who escaped from Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia to Switzerland in 1941, Sirc returned three years later to fight as a Partizan, was then imprisoned for seven years (mostly in solitary) as an anti-Communist, and after escaping to the West, became an esteemed economist at the University of Glasgow. His eleven-page critique said Slovenia, despite holding free elections after becoming independent and calling itself "democratic" was run by the very same men who governed it as Communists — Drnovsek, Kucan et al. Entitled "Post Mortem" and originally written in English it was widely circulated but barred from publication in Slovenia.

The daily *Delo* referred to it briefly in an editorial calling the Sirc critique "a shock." One of his most damning statements was that after forty-five years of Communist rule and two year of "multiparty" governance, the wages of Slovenian workers were at about the same level as in 1940.

Having read Dr, Sirc's keen analyses of socialist economics, I telephoned him in Glasgow. He said, "In a way it is business as usual. The Communists have taken it upon themselves to save the country from Communism. It is not a very good way to do things." He said he had attempted to protest the conduct of Slovenia's so-called "free elections" in a phone call to Prime Minister Drnovsek, but was rebuffed. "It was almost impossible to talk to him, Dr. Sirc said. "Conversations were very short — all he did was say yes or no."

He outlived Drnovsek by more than eleven years.

CROATIA

Historically, at least, Croatia seems to have spent much of its existence with a chip on its shoulder.

The Croatians came into — recorded — existence in the seventh century, about the same time as their linguistic relatives, the Serbs (some linguistic evidence suggests both tribes originated in Persia). But Croats were always smaller in number than the Serbs, by about a half, and their medieval principality lasted just two hundred and fifty years. For their part Serbian rulers maintained sovereignty from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries until finally eliminated by Ottoman Turks and Hungary. Moreover the Serbs were among the first nations — along with the Greeks — to rise up against imperial domination (in both cases Ottoman) whereas the Croats achieved liberation through the Allies' defeat of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies in World War I.

Croats tend to make up for their perceived inequalities by claiming they are more "European" than the Serbs by virtue of their use of the Roman alphabet instead of the Cyrillic, of their affinity to the Roman Catholic Church instead of Eastern Orthodoxy and by sheer geographic proximity to the north and west.

In fact, the Croats have a lot going for them in the context of modern South Slav (*Jugoslav*) history — as unifiers rather than as separatists.

The very idea of *Jugoslavija* was born in Croatia in the 1830s as a group of young intellectuals joined to create a movement dedicated to national renewal by way of a standard language and a broader concept of unification of all south Slavs. Inspired, among others, by Ludevit Gaj, a journalist who created the Croatian alphabet and in 1834 the first Croatian newspaper, the movement soon adopted the designation "Illyrian."

Rooted in the name of the ancient tribe inhabiting a large swath of the western Balkans, Illyria was the name given it as a province by the conquering Romans. In 1809, Napoleon revived it after subduing the Austrians, and created the short-lived Illyrian Provinces. But after his final defeat in 1816, the revived Austro-Hungarian empire restored its northernmost regions as the Kingdom of Illyria. Thus the "Illyria" concept became common currency throughout the region.

For the Zagreb intellectuals, the main threat to the Croatian identity came from Hungary and its efforts by newly nationalistic Budapest authorities to Magyarize the Croatians — enforcing the teaching of Hungarian in schools.

In 1842, one of their leaders, Janko Drašković, opened an "Illyrian" reading room, called the *Matica* (Matrix).

Renamed *Matica Hrvatska* (Croatian Matrix) it became the nation's principal publishing house. (Serbs had created the *Matica Srpska* in the same spirit in sixteen years earlier)

Also in 1842, Dragutin Rakovac, a member of the Illyrian group, borrowed a pan-Slavic anthem (composed eight years earlier by a Slovak, Samuel Tomasik, to a Polish melody) and translated it into Croatian, which began: *Hej Iliri!* ("Hey, Illyrians!"). This did not catch on, but when that was changed to *Hej Slaveni!* ("Hey, Slavs!") it became a hit and was adopted by Poland in 1926 and Yugoslavia in 1945 as a national anthem.

But in 1850, the Zagreb "Illyrians" went a huge step further — meeting with Serbian intellectuals to sign the "Vienna Literary Agreement" proclaiming that the Shtokavian dialect (spoken mainly in eastern Hercegovina and favored by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the great Serbian linguist) should become the basis for a common, Serbo-Croat language. They also agreed that the Croats' Latin alphabet and the Serbs' Cyrillic would be equally valid.

The Croats went still further to institutionalize the concept of "Yugoslavia" by founding a Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences in Zagreb in 1866. Its principal patron was Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, then Croatia's leading advocate of higher education — and patron of the arts. The academy was sanctioned by the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef and went on to produce a great variety of scientific works including historical and ethnological studies. (I visited the Academy as a delegate from Harvard to convey the oldest American university's greetings and congratulations at its centennial celebration in autumn 1966.

In 1991, after declaring independence from the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the academy was renamed "Croatian" — as it had been by the Fascist *Ustaše* regime in 1941.

Croats experienced a mostly unhappy sojourn (1918–1929) in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was transmuted (1929–1941) into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was mainly ruled by Serbs.

Then — astonishingly — after a vicious three-year stretch as a nominally independent *Ustaše* state (but in fact an Axis satrap) during World War II, Croatia came to be governed by a native son, Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980).

But as a dedicated Communist — by definition an "internationalist" in those days — Tito felt constrained to demonstrate that, in the recreated and now "socialist" Yugoslavia, he was not singling

out Croatia for favor among its six republics. This was a huge challenge. Many Croats viewed him as a renegade if not a downright traitor.

Becoming aware of those sentiments at the end of the 1960s, Tito consulted with Vladimir Bakarić, a close associate who headed the party in Zagreb and had a reputation of being relatively liberal. They agreed that it was time to loosen the reins and to allow open discussion of economic issues and even Croatian nationhood.

It was a stirring time across Europe: student riots in Paris; violent youth demonstrations in Germany and elsewhere; and the "Czech Spring" striving for "Socialism With a Human Face" but quickly crushed by Soviet tanks in 1968.

But in playing around with anti-authorianism, Tito and Bakarić were playing with fire. In the spring of 1971, Bakarić's successor at the helm in Zagreb, Savka Dabčević-Kučar and her right-hand man, Mika Tripalo, launched a series of rallies. They were attended by wildly enthusiastic young people, and promoted a Croatian agenda. This became known as *maspok*, an abbreviated form of "mass movement" and it soon escalated into something they could barely control.

(Meanwhile, the Croatian Diaspora in Germany, Canada and Australia, were plotting against Tito's Yugoslavia and launched their own campaign of grisly terror attacks including the brazen kidnapping and killing of Vladimir Rolović, the Ambassador to Sweden, in Stockholm on April 7, 1971.)

As the movement grew, students began demanding an independent Croatia. Some began singing the anthem "Our Beloved Homeland," which had been frowned on since *Ustaše* days. Inspired by *maspok*, Croatian enterprises boycotted non-Croat partners. Zagreb news kiosks refused to stock Belgrade newspapers or magazines. "Everything had to be Croatian," a businessman complained to me at the time.

Ultimately, Tito intervened. He convened a conference at his Karadjordjevo hunting lodge of the Zagreb leadership at the beginning of December, fully seven months after the *maspok* events. A wholesale purge of the party liberals followed, starting with Mrs. Dabčević-Kučar and Tripalo. Thousands of lesser members were expelled and some imprisoned (including Franjo Tuđman, later President of an independent Croatia — though Tito intervened to shorten his prison term). Leading nationalist organizations and publications, including *Matica Hrvatska*, were closed.

When the scope of Tito's actions became known, many of the Zagreb University's 30,000 students boycotted classes and took to the streets for four days and caused a lot of damage. I traveled from Germany after the police had made 170 arrests. It was a grim scene.

Croatia was not alone as a target for Tito's vindictiveness. As the Grand Balancer on the precarious scales of Yugoslavia, he moved to make certain that other republics would pay a price for the Croatian excesses. Serbia had to sacrifice two of its liberal leaders. Slovenia and Macedonia each had to sacrifice one — a generation of Yugoslavian political talent.

Astonishingly, some loyal and effective "Yugoslav" leaders emerged in Zagreb after the *maspok* was subdued, beginning with Milka Planinc, the immediate successor to Savka Dabčević-Kučar. In the end, the widely admired Croat, Ante Marković, served as the last prime minister of Yugoslavia and stayed in office even after it collapsed in 1991.

Along with others who came to Yugoslavia in its heyday and liked it, I wanted to believe it could be preserved. In retrospect, one could see that the ideal of *Jugoslavija*, born in patriotic Croatian hearts in the 1840s, died on the cobblestone streets of Zagreb in the 1970s. Hatred of Serbs, latent in many Croatian hearts, flared up from time to time over the next two decades, bursting into a four-alarm fire in 1990.

When I returned to Zagreb in the autumn of 1983, three years after the death of Tito, the mood of the Croats seemed brighter — despite power cuts and protracted blackouts. There was an air of elegance in the Croatian capital that was largely lacking in chaotic Belgrade and other Yugoslav metropols — perhaps a hangover of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. I felt it in the Esplanade Hotel built in 1925 next to the main railway station. There the liveried doorman in a braided hussar's coat recognized me from previous visits and tipped his hat. In the dining room with its deep red velour banquettes and chandeliers of glinting crystal, it was not hard to picture Josip Broz Tito, always a luxury lover, finishing a cup of coffee here before setting off for Serbia to lead a Communist uprising against the German occupiers. As Comrade Walter, he had received his marching orders from Moscow on July 1, 1941 — one week after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union and three months after the Nazi conquest of Yugoslavia.

Tito's portrait hung in many offices and patriotic graffiti with his name was scrawled on Zagreb walls, but it seemed as if his death had lifted a weight from the Croatian spirit, which no longer felt it was being weighed on his scales. At that moment, Croatia was relishing a surge in industrial output, a very good harvest and a huge growth in tourism – mostly along its 1,005-mile Adriatic coastline and some 1,000 islands.

"Thank God, thank the Devil, things look better," said Vlado Mihaljević (55), vice chairman of the *Sabor*, the republican assembly, speaking warmly of Milka Planinc, the prime minister. "She took on the toughest job. She could have retired and taken it easy. Croatia was calmer than in the

maspok days, he said, with sixty incarcerated as "separatists," some of whom were connected to foreign organizations.

Ljubo Boban, a fifty-year-old Zagreb University historian with a broad face faintly reminiscent of Tito's, was firmly opposed to separatism. But he reminded me that fragmentation was a characteristic of all Balkan peoples. "You Americans want to view us as Americans, not as Balkan people. Like Americans, Yugoslavs can be practical, but they can be destructive, too — what I would call positive destructivism, not accepting the existing state of affairs, a kind of resistance." He paused to let me have time to take this in, then added with a nice touch of irony: "Whether that is always appropriate is another question."

Boban's opposition to separatism took a public turn in the 1960s (well before the *maspok*) and focused on a new colleague at the university's Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement of Croatia named Franjo Tuđman. Earlier, he had reached the rank of General in the Serb-dominated Peoples Army — without having served as a Partisan fighter — as a token Croat. Now he wanted to be accepted as a scholar. However his doctoral dissertation was rejected by Professor Boban who denounced him as a "nationalist." Undeterred, Tuđman took his thesis to the new University of Zadar, which immediately granted him a doctorate. Whatever Tudjman lacked in academic skills, he compensated with a prodigious outpouring of writing. This tripped him up in 1967 when Professor Boban wrote a scathing dissection of Tudjman's "Creation of Socialist Yugoslavia" in which he proved that the author had resorted to blatant plagiarism. Tuđman was expelled from the party at this time.

Somehow he always managed to land on his feet. Although he was arrested in 1971 along with other maspok activists, he served only ten months in prison before being quietly amnestied by President Tito. The same happened in 1981 when he was charged with "spreading enemy propaganda" and sentenced to three years in prison and five years of house arrest. In fact he served less than a year and then continued his career as a political activist climaxing with the creation of the HDZ, the abbreviation of the Croatian Democratic Party, on 17 June 1989. A year later he was elected president of Croatia. I met him several times in 1993 and found him insufferably vain — the last time in his palatial Zagreb residence, where the entrance was guarded by six-footers in nineteenth century uniforms topped by shakos with 20-inch pheasant feathers. He died in 1999 after driving out 200,000 Croatian Serbs. (From 1941 to 1945 the Ustaše regime had killed at least 380,000 Serbs — some experts say 600,000.)

Two years later a close friend, the journalist Davor Glavaš, guided me to the splendid Mirogoj Cemetery atop a hill overlooking the capital where the nation's prominent figures are buried. The plot had been owned by Ludevit Gaj, the nineteenth linguist (also buried there). Before the cupola and twin towers of the main building was a huge marble slab bearing the graven name of "Dr. Franjo Tudjman" — as a kind of rebuke to Ljubo Boban.

Davor tugged my arm to guide me to another sumptuous tomb a few feet away. It bore the name Vejko Slisko, a racketeer who had died aged 32 in a hail of bullets on March 22, 2001 in Flower Market Square, in the city center just below the cemetery. "I told you, all the important people of Croatia end up here," he said. Josip Broz nicknamed Tito who was born 27 miles to the north in the village of Kumrovec, had long outgrown his homeland and was buried near his last home in Belgrade.

DALMATIA

The question was, where — in these recollections — to place Dalmatia, with the peaks of the Dinaric Range looming above its spectacular Adriatic coast?

Dalmatia has both Croatian and Serbian roots. Vlach roots, too.

Dalmatae, the name of an Illyrian tribe *(*possibly related to a word for sheep) gave the region its name. It was settled by Croats in the seventh century. However it became officially part of Croatia only in 1939. Ethnic Croats also constituted the great majority (80 percent) of the population for centuries. But Dalmatia also had a population of Serbs (and Vlachs) who made distinct marks on the region for a millenium. Hence these impressions are recorded separately from Croatia and Serbia.

One of the first persons I encountered on the Dalmatian coast was a Serbian-Montenegrin painter, Jovan Običan. He had a studio just south of the ancient walled city of Dubrovnik (aka *Ragusa* or *Laus*, depending on when one lived there) overlooking the azure bay. I visited him in 1963 to write about his strikingly original approach to art, to Yugoslavia and to life. He was then forty-four, hard-working, modest, genial and incredibly productive.

Noting that the family name *običan* meant "ordinary" in Serbo-Croatian, he related how he had approached a mayor in a Bosnian town to ask permission to mount an exhibit. "*Obican?*" replied the mayor. "That's all right, I'm nothing but a small fry myself."

Recently, I looked up Običan on the Internet and found, that after graduating from the Serbian Academy of Arts in Belgrade, he began painting landscapes and seascapes in a semi-abstract style. By the time I encountered him he had switched to a folkloric mode that caused his fellow Academy graduates to mock Obican and disdain his almost cartoonish paintings: They featured heavily bearded men gripping scimitars, cheeks aglow with brandy; half-veiled dark-eyed village beauties; wild-eyed priests; a vendor carrying a wooden cage of colorful birds on his shoulders; a Jewish wedding: A panoply of delightful Balkan types done in broad strokes and bright colors — sometimes with legendary figures like the giant Prince Marko, who wielded a 1,000 pound club and carried a goatskin containing 1,000 liters of wine. In his early days he also modeled these distinctive figures in clay, carved them in wood and shaped inlays with different woods. (Some of these he presented to me as gifts.)

With Dubrovnik's reputation as a tourist attraction soaring throughout the 1960s, Obican's large studio filled with foreign visitors, some staying on as apprentice artists. His sales, including signed prints, grew swiftly.

One day he told a Dubrovnik story involving a painter just north on the coast road who had developed a lucrative market among foreign tourists with one simple theme: “Dubrovnik By Night.” The painter — suave, slender, handsome (whom I had briefly met) with the common name Kovačević — was, I believe, a Croat. His was a view from the heights of Mount Srd of the little medieval city surrounded by high crenallated walls interspersed with turrets. Lights glistened red, and yellowish-white from various windows. Yachts and fishing boats lay softly outlined in the old harbor. The night sky loomed a dark blue below to black above, with a tiny star or two. Romantic! Kovačević sold dozens of “Dubrovnik By Night” each month, Obican related, until one day a foreign millionaire visited him and said he wanted to buy the early version hanging in the lobby of the venerable Hotel Argentina and was flatly refused by the hostelry’s manager.

“I’ll paint one exactly like it,” said Kovacevic.

“No,” said the millionaire. “I want that one. I will pay you a lot to steal it for me and replace it with a fresh one.”

“All right,” said the painter.

In the wee hours a few nights later Kovacevic slipped into the deserted lobby with a fresh “Dubrovnik By Night,” climbed up to remove the old one and hang the new — almost identical — work in its place. The millionaire got what he wanted and the painter was suddenly a lot wealthier. There was only one flaw in the plan. The fresh artwork was wet. A tiny rivulet of black paint ran down from the “Dubrovnik By Night” sky and onto the lobby floor by the front desk. The manager saw it and called the *Milicija* (as the police were called in those days). A raid on Kovačević’s villa was scheduled. But someone tipped off the painter just in time. He packed quickly, got into his speedy new foreign roadster and fled northward. Soon the *milicija* was hot on his trail by car and by long-distance telephone (before the days of radio-telephone in those parts) up Adriatic coast through Split, through Sibenik, through Zadar.

“Yes, he just passed through.”

“No we couldn’t catch up to him.”

Finally the car was spotted at the Zagreb airport. But Kovačević was aready on board a jet that was taxiing on the runway, bound for the United States. As Običan told it, Kovačević settled somewhere in the American southwest — Arizona, he thought, and made a living there for some years until he felt safe enough to return. Whether he went on painting “Dubrovnik By Night”could not be learned.

I recall going to the Adriatic coast fairly often as a correspondent (and I vacationed, at Makarska and Mali Losinj and the "lavender island" — Hvar).

One occasion was August 23, 1963, when I was chasing Premier Nikita Khrushchev (with a horde of other correspondents) up the Adriatic coast. He was with President Tito aboard the Yugoslav Communist's's yacht, *Galeb* (Seagull), a prize of war seized from the Italian merchant marine in which it had been a banana boat. They stopped at harbors along the way including Dubrovnik. (We correspondents followed on jam-packed coastal steamers or a rented motor boat.)

Another was the eleventh Pugwash Conference on Disarmament a month later. Like its preceding sessions it was mainly devoted to paths toward total nuclear disarmament. Coming four weeks after the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in Moscow, that was a big story. Among the sixty scientists attending was Henry A. Kissinger, then a Harvard professor and an adviser to the Kennedy White House. He was very amicable and confided that the "real business" of the conference — exchanging detailed proposals on disarmament, took place in confidential gatherings with coffee or fruit juice on the seashore — away from the formal meetings in a Dubrovnik art gallery. This was before Kissinger became internationally famous — and he was cultivating scientists, not journalists.

A rival of Venice as commercial maritime power and later a Venetian possession, Dubrovnik then became subject to the kingdom of Hungary and, in the fifteenth century — as the Ragusan Republic — a tributary of the Ottoman Empire. Its merchant marine even briefly served the Spanish Empire. Dubrovnik had been washed in many waters. A setting fit for an East-West meeting on regulating weapons of mass destruction!

After the disarmament sessions, I lingered long enough to observe the Yom Kippur ceremony at one of Europe's most ancient Sephardic synagogues. Built In 1352, it served a community that numbered several hundred before World War II but, after Nazi deportations, only a handful remained afterward. Dubrovnik Jews, many of them *Marrano* refugees from Spain and Portugal, contributed to the city state's culture as craftsmen and traders. One of the descendants was the cantor, Emilio Tolentino, then aged sixty-five (his family name originated in Spain's Toledo). He said it was difficult to assemble a *minyan* of ten to perform a prayer service but that "the world does not stand still for one family — perhaps other Jews will come here."

Dubrovnik became known internationally by that name only after World War II, when the victorious Yugoslav Communists elected to use that Slavic name rather than its older, Italian name *Ragusa* (from the Latin *Communitas Ragusina*), also the name of its republic from 1358 to 1808. My mother, who had visited *Ragusa* in 1930, refused to acknowledge "Dubrovnik" when she returned in

1964 — although the Slavic peoples had called it Dubrovnik — from the word for oak grove — as early as the twelfth century.

Becoming a rival of Venice in sea commerce *Ragusa* developed its own school of poets and playwrights in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I learned years later. But what was most essential to know about this city state was its devotion to freedom (but only its own, not anybody else's freedom). Indeed the word *Libertas* was inscribed on its coat of arms and ship pennants. Free, but not democratic. It was ruled by aristocrats.

Though something of a vassal to the kingdom of Hungary in medieval days and then to the Ottoman Turks, it retained largely the status of a free city-state for 350 years. This gave *Ragusa* with its population of 30,000 (5,000 within its walls), protection from Venice, its suzerain from 1205 to 1358 and its chief maritime rival for centuries. For this the town had to pay 15,000 gold ducats annually to The Porte. The Turks liked it so well they called it *Dobro Venedik* "the good Venice." The years of liberty lasted — in 1776 the *Ragusan Republic* became the first foreign power to recognize the United States — until the French defeated Austria-Hungary and Napoleon's army entered *Ragusa* in 1806. They defeated a combined force of Russians and Montenegrins — the latter rushing up the coast to rape and plunder. The republic was abolished two years later.

Dubrovnik pleased the senses. Dalmatian wines like black Dingac and white Plavac have distinctive aromas. Long black Adriatic mussels are tasty enough to rate their own festival in the autumn. To stroll on the gleaming limestone paving stones of the *Stradun* (the main street) — with its fountains and the column of Orlando (Roland), the patron hero, while hearing low voices and the laughter of citizens exchanging gossip as they promenaded — was to transport yourself back to the Adriatic and Illyria of Shakespeare for the setting of *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Twelfth Night*. The girdling walls, some nineteen feet wide, reaching up to eighty feet, frame the city nicely, as many painters have shown, and the soft red of the tiled roofs contrast well with the blue sea beyond.

Enjoyable, too, were the many paintings of a Ragusan galley bucking violent seas while the ship owner prayed in a lower corner on his knees to Saint Vlaho (Blaise) in the opposite upper corner, holding a model of their walled city, smiling.

Visiting in 1984, I noticed something that may always have been present, a certain snootiness toward Belgrade — the metropolis of the south Slav Lands — and even toward Zagreb. A local singer, Frano Lasić, referred during his performance to the Serbian nation as *Poar,* a slang word meaning "barbarians."

I returned in November 1991 as a sort of siege of the little city intensified. The *JNA* (Yugoslav Peoples Army), mostly Montenegrin units, preferred the term *Blokada* against Croatian defenders. I had been driven up the coast by a Serbian captain from Herceg Novi to Cavtat, across the bay from Dubrovnik. Burnt out villages and destroyed vehicles along the way were evidence that the attackers were reviving the rapine customs of their Montenegrin ancestors from 1806. (although not the raping! …some of the loot turned up later on Montenegrin black markets).

I boarded the Argosy, a ferry that was guaranteed safe passage by both Serbs and Croats for a dozen United Nations peacekeepers wearing white uniforms — which immediately provoked a mocking nickname, "the ice cream men." We landed in the old harbor and proceeded on foot a few hundred yards to the Argentina. Despite housing seventy refugees from the Konavle region just to the south of the broad bay, the venerable hotel had room for us.

What ensued — the first actual hostile gunfire in the entire history of Dubrovnik — was more like theater than actual warfare between the 7,000 or more *JNA* troops versus 1,000 or so armed Croats. The besiegers tested all their new weaponry from the cannon of navy patrol boats, to swoops by fighter planes, to wire guided missiles and mortars mounted just to the south from the heights of 5,000 foot Mount Zarkovica. As if it were a training exercise. The defenders replied with salvos from artillery pieces mounted on the city walls and on Mount Srd just to the east, and sniper bullets. The total confirmed human losses were six civilians killed by shells in October. (On Nov. 10, 1991, Croatian officials had declared the number of dead was 58! While the *JNA* claimed at least 60 of its men were killed in the offensive!)

One of the wounded was Phil Davison, reporter for *The Independent* of London. He was grazed in the leg by a Croatian(!) sniper bullet while standing in front of the Argentina. "I saw the sniper up on the ridge," he told me after I fetched him some aspirin. I used to think of him with sympathy. But decades later I read he had reported five times (!) in a period of four months under his byline that Dubrovnik was totally burned to the ground by the Serbs.

One morning, standing on the Argentina's seaside terrace with the European monitors, we watched *JNA* shell the south walls and old harbor using rockets and wire-guided missiles — the St. Ivan and St. Minceta towers, then the town hall. At 11a.m., the clock tower bell tolled. It was silent at noon. A missile hit the "green men" — two bronze figures nicknamed Maro and Baro, carrying hammers to strike the bell that had been brought to Dubrovnik from Venice in the thirteenth century. Then missiles fell in the harbor, sinking what looked like a rowboat with one volley, and the ferry Argosy, with the next. "There goes our ride of here," a Danish colonel in an "ice cream suit"

muttered. We waited another week, departing during a ceasefire aboard the coastal steamer *Slavija* along with several thousand refugees (and most of the reporters). The siege continued until after Christmas.

In reality, Croatia won the war with the Serbs and Montenegrins at this time without even having to do much. Dubrovnik was probably the best known city in Yugoslavia. In 1979 it had been named a "World Heritage Site" by UNESCO.

Tens of thousands of Americans, Britons, French, Italians and Germans had sojourned there or disembarked from a cruise ship. (And I was one of a dozen Western correspondents reporting and broadcasting the siege events on the spot.)

Despite the horror stories, the facts emerged later that, along with the six deaths by shellfire, 563 Dubrovnik buildings had been hit and damaged — about 68 percent of the total. But just 9 buildings had been destroyed — by fire.

The mountains of Dalmatia and the deep valleys of the interior are in a region called Lika, settled by Croats in the seventh century and later by Serbs and Vlachs as well, most of them fleeing the northward push of the Ottoman Turks. Much of it is covered with *karst,* porous limestone containing numerous *dolina* — sinkholes — big enough to be farmed — or grazed — not to mention underground rivers. A beautiful, but rough country.

Lika's history was shaped in large part by the competition of three empires that converged in its valleys, fields, harbors and on its sea lanes: the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy centered to the northeast in Vienna, the Ottoman Empire to the southeast and the Venetian Empire to the northwest.

There was a joke about the brown bears of Lika and Bosnia (some standing eight feet tall) that was told in Yugoslav urban communities:

"What happens when a bear moves from Lika to Bosnia?"

"Lika loses a citizen and Bosnia gains an intellectual."

When I told this yarn to Michael B. Petrovich, a brilliant professor of Slavic history at the University of Wisconsin, he shot back: "My family is from Lika. My grandfather met a bear there and the bear slapped him. After that, all my grandfather ever said was, *'Bears are bad animals.'"* Petrovich (1922-1989) of Serbian AND Croatian parentage, wrote about his family's homeland and, "the Slavs who swept down from the Dinaric mountains in early medieval times…."

Lika was home to Croats but also to some remarkable Serbs, It was the birthplace of the Serbian Nikola Tesla (1856–1943). This amazing scientist-inventor, whose discoveries in the field of

electromagnetism helped create commercial electricity, was from Smiljan, a village near the town of Gospic.

Another remarkable Lika Serb is Jovanka Budisavljevic Broz (1924-), who at age 17 in 1942 distinguished herself as a sharpshooter in the First Women's Partizan Brigade. A year later she arranged a meeting between her future husband, Josip Broz Tito, and his rival, Colonel Draza Mihailovic, commander of the Chetnik (*Četnik*) movement. In her account (revealed for the first time sixty-eight years later[*]) she brought them together in her native Lika village of Pećani, near Knin — "They talked, they slept the one next to the other on a bed of straw." Next day, several of Tito's guards were killed in an explosion on a nearby bridge — a trap the Partizans blamed on the Chetniks. In any case it was the last time the two met. Reassigned by the Partizans as a nurse, she was at Drvar in May 1944 when a combined Wehrmacht-SS operation of paratroopers and glider troops raided the cave where Tito had his headquarters. He barely escaped. Whether Jovanka caught his — roving — eye at this time is unknown.

She became his third wife in 1952. (I met this dignified woman at a state reception in 1966.) Tito eventually tired of her — as he had tired of sixteen other women with whom he had intimate relations (and 16 documented children). He moved out of their home in 1975 and, after his death five years later, Jovanka was placed under house arrest for many years and reduced to near poverty.

One of the chief historical features of Dalmatia that Croats shared with Serbs was their joint participation in the practice of piracy. Both peoples were painfully damaged by the expansion of Ottoman power to Bosnia and Hercegovina in the first decade of the sixteenth century.

Serbs and Croats fled northwest to Dalmatia. But Turkish armies then pushed into Dalmatia itself, bringing massive destruction and bloodshed.

One of the first Lika towns to fall to the Ottomans was Knin in 1522. At this time Austria's Emperor Ferdinand, who had just acquired Croatia, established what was called the Military Frontier in Dalmatia along the Adriatic coast where the Turks were pushing toward the sea, and was planting colonies of defenders — mostly refugee Serbs — along it. These Serbs were called *Grenzer* in German, *Krajisnici* in Serbo-Croat — the English equivalent being "border guards."

Meanwhile the Ottoman forces were stymied less than seven miles from the coast at the mountain (elevation: 1,180 feet) fortress of Klis, defended by a brave commander, Petar Kružić, a Croat who held out for more than twenty years. Like the Serbian frontiersmen, he organized bands of Uskoks,

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[*] On Sept 5, 2011, *Blic*, the Belgrade daily, published a story based on Wikileaks revelations of US diplomatic cables that an American diplomat visited Jovanka Broz in 2009 and that she told him the story of Tito meeting Mihailović.

taking the name from a word meaning “jumping in” or ambushing as a means of defending themselves against the Turks.

Captain Kružić finally succumbed to superior forces at Klis in 1537. Some Uskoks were able to flee 130 miles up the coast to a citadel where, a few years later, Captain Ivan Lenković, a skilled leader of both Croats and Serbs, built a fort on the Dinaric peak, Nehaj, looming 1,270 feet above the port of Senj.

At Senj the Uskoks turned their talents for ambush from land to sea, briefly with a blessing from Venice, the great sea power of the day whose senate counted for a time on the Uskoks to provide protection of its vital trade lanes from the increasing threats of Ottoman warships and merchant vessels. But this was an on-again off-again affair. The Uskoks came to live in a symbiotic relationship with Venice, which made a truce with the Turks in 1539. Uskoks became equal opportunity pirates, attacking a Venetian ship in 1566, then raiding Venetian shipping and ports on a regular basis. There was even an Uskok “war” between Venice and Austria in 1615. Two years later a peace treaty was signed forcing the Uskok formations to disband.

I kept encountering Lika connections. There was Zlatko Sinobad I knew for years as a “Yugoslav” who suddenly disclosed in the 1990s that he was a Serb from Knin, furthermore from a renowned Uskok family that had been knighted in the sixteenth century for services to Venice.

There was Vlatka Glavaš, the wife of my Croatian colleague, Davor Glavas, from a Lika town. When I asked her about Uskoks her dark eyes flashed and she recited the proverb: *Cuvaj se Sejnske bure i Ličke cure* — “Watch out for Senj storms and Lika girls.” (The *bure* referred to a northeast wind that blows sometimes over 100 miles per hour onto the Adriatic coast around Senj. Peasants hang prosciutto ham and other cuts in the wind to dry the meat, which gives it a unique flavor.

Finally there was Stjepen Mesic (1934–), then nominally president of what remained of Yugoslavia. He was aboard the ferry Slavija transporting refugees from Dubrovnik (and me) to Herceg Novi in November, 1991. He succeeded Franjo Tudjman as president of Croatia and served from 2000 to 2010. It turns out he was only part-Croat. His grandfather was born a Roma (Gypsy) named Idriz Udjorović of a partly Serbian family in the Lika mountain town of Jezerana, according to *Oko*, a Croatian Internet portal.

Before the Yugoslav wars, 1991-1995, nearly 600,000 Serbs lived in Croatia comprising more than 12 percent of the population. Afterward there were only some 200,000 — largely a result of the Serb attempt in 1991 to create their own “republic” in Lika’s Krajina district. The name was derived

from the Serbo-Croatian term *krajisnici,* the sixteenth century Serb border guards. The Serbs had been numerous in the Krajina and in 1995 the Croats drove most of them out.

BULGARIA

Suspicion of western visitors in Bulgaria was pervasive in the middle of the Cold War. As a visitor it seemed almost tangible, even in hotels. For me, finding Bulgarians to be generous and open hosts came decades later.

A penumbra of mistrust surrounded a 1963 government advisory warning artists and writers to avoid western fashions and forms. Todor Zhivkov, a dictator with the title of First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, devoted part of a speech on cultural affairs to a denunciation of a performance on a Bulgarian stage of "that worldwide-rage, the Twist" which could "poison our youth!" In a similar vein, Zhivkov threatened novelists and poets: "Writers have no business going to the West." Idle threats?

During my Balkan days Todor Zhivkov, with his long thin nose, seemed not only to dog the steps of the nine million Bulgarians but my steps as well.

The main road through Bulgaria runs along verdant valleys between the long humps of the Balkan mountain range to the north and the higher peaks of the Rila range to the south — "Balkan" being the Turkish word for mountain and doubtless deriving from centuries of Ottoman rule. On a larger scale it is part of the historic route connecting northern Europe and the Middle East.

The path was that taken westward by migrating Goths in the fourth century and then by Turkic-Altaic peoples including the Huns. Turkish armies of the Ottomans marched along the same roads nine hundred years later.

Eastward, the route was followed by the Roman legions that conquered Thrace in the first century. During his reign in the second century, Emperor Trajan fortified the town of Serdica, the future Sofia. Emperor Constantine journeyed along the same road in the fourth century (he was born along the way in Naissus-Niš in what is now Serbia). Constantine liked Serdica, where he resided before proceeding to the Greek town of Byzantium out of which he created Constantinople as his imperial capital. Crusaders strode along the eastward route in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Migrating tribes, marching armies and other travelers left lasting marks in architecture (among them amphitheaters and minarets), cuisine, language and, undoubtedly, DNA. I learned a Balkan word, "bitanga" for "marauder" which later became a designation for "thief" and still later "vagabond," "brute," "rascal" or "bumpkin." Etymologists have determined it is a contraction of the German *bitte* and *danke* — "please" and "thanks" — in both Serbian and Bulgarian. It appears to be

a linguistic deposit of German crusaders who plundered and raped their way with please-and-thanks across the Balkans to Byzantium and on to the Holy Land.

Yet the original Bulgarians, of Slavic origin, came down from the northeast rather than on the traditional Balkan path. Crossing the broad Danube delta they spread southward along the shores of the Black Sea and inland, thrashing the forces of the Byzantine Empire and establishing their first state in the late seventh century. The lands remain Bulgarian to this day, a territory where the people have long enjoyed a reputation as gifted gardeners. During the ninth and tenth centuries and again in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Bulgarian kings created empires that reached across the peninsula from the Black Sea to the Adriatic and down to the Aegean, making their country a major European power. Belgrade — much later the Serbian capital — was for a time a Bulgarian citadel. So was Salonika, the north Aegean port of Greece.

But for five centuries there was no Bulgaria, only the Ottoman Empire and what the nation's greatest writer, Ivan Vasov, called "The Turkish Yoke." Insurrection movements were growing when Bulgaria was finally liberated in 1878 by troops of the Russian Tsar. "The Bulgarians never liberated themselves," a Yugoslav diplomat from neighboring Macedonia remarked to me, adding, "After the Russians liberated them they only won one war, a short one in 1885. Bulgarian history is a discontinuity. They chose the wrong side in three wars," which, in the space of three decades, resulted in defeat in the Second Balkan War and again in both World Wars when Bulgaria sided with Germany. "There is no fixed reference point," the Macedonian concluded. "For Bulgarians, who is to say the choices they make now are not wrong?"

In modern times, some nations seem to have been cursed with a succession of bad leaders. If that was the case, Bulgaria could be one of them. Some of its kings and Communists were not merely bad but downright evil.

During World War II, Bulgaria was, by the choice of its monarchy (of Germany's Saxe-Coburg-Gotha dynasty) a satellite of Nazi Germany. As a reward, Hitler invited Bulgaria to occupy not only the Macedonian region of neighboring Yugoslavia but also the southern part of Romania's Dobrogea region facing the Black Sea. In August-September 1944, with German forces in retreat in the southeastern Balkans, the Red Army swept in under Marshal Fyodor Tolbukhin. Bulgaria swiftly became a satellite of the Soviet Union. Thereafter pro-Moscow sympathies drawing on Russia's role in helping liberate Bulgaria from Turkish rule in 1878 steadily evaporated.

Communist Bulgaria spent its first nine years on the Cold War frontline voicing, like the other East European satellites, extreme hostility to the United States. Diplomatic relations remained chilled below the ambassadorial level.

A slight change occurred in 1963 when state television invited Eugenie Anderson, the American minister in Sofia, to mark the American independence day on July 4. I traveled to report on this shift in relations, driving the 240 miles from Belgrade to Sofia on fairly smooth two-lane roads along the ancient Crusader-invader route.

I took the opportunity to look around the pleasant capital on the western banks of the Iskar River, below the slopes of Mount Vitosha rising 7,513 feet just to the south. My sketchy acquaintance with Bulgaria included a sociological study called *Balkan Village*, by Irwin T. Sanders, about the peasants of Dragalevtsy, a Vitosha village. Sanders recorded an example of Balkan ethnocentrism in a verse of a local hora: "There is nothing deeper than the Iskar, nothing higher than Vitosha and Sofia is the greatest city." Quaint perhaps to an outsider, but displaying a villager's ethnocentric view of the earth. As Sanders had foreseen — he first came in the 1930s — Dragalevtsy was exposed to the demands of visitors from the nearby city for amenities like electricity and running water. Even as I came on the scene, tens of thousands of Sofia dwellers were flocking to Vitosha for refreshment on weekends.

In 2003, a Bulgarian film director discovered fresh evidence that ethnocentrism remains a vital force — perhaps THE vital force — animating not merely Bulgarians but all the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula. The documentary, created by Adela Peeva, traces a popular song across southeastern Europe from Turkey to Greece, on to Albania and Bosnia, to Macedonia and Serbia and finally back to her native Bulgaria. At each stop in *Whose Is This Song?* she recorded local musicians and singers who asserted that both the tune and the lyric was irrefutably THEIRS and belonged to THEIR people. In Bosnia it was "Anatolian Girl," "Thick Hair" in Serbia, "Oh My Dear Patsa" in Macedonia and, "A Clear Moon Is Rising" in Bulgaria. Nasty scenes ensued, even death threats, when she dared to suggest or demonstrate that others in other Balkan countries laid claim to the song. Peeva's film proved ethnocentrism transcends borders, political parties and the other trappings of national states.

Looking around downtown Sofia on that first visit, I came upon the imposing three-story mausoleum of white marble on Ninth of September Square dedicated to Georgi Dimitrov, Bulgaria's most famous Communist. It had been built in just six days, the time it took to bring his remains from Moscow, where he died to Sofia. Two guards in ninteenth century dress, white tunics and caps

topped with a tall pheasant feather, holding rifles with gleaming bayonets, alternately stood stiff at attention or slow-marched back and forth before the entrance. It was a Bulgarian version of Lenin's tomb.

Dimitrov, with his thick eyebrows and moustache, remained controversial long after his death. He had co-founded the party in 1919, led an abortive uprising, escaped to Moscow, humiliated the Nazis when they tried to convict him of complicity in setting fire to the Reichstag in 1933, served as secretary general of the Comintern from 1935 to 1943, then returned to Sofia to run Communist Bulgaria — under Stalin's direction.

Then he made the huge misstep of getting together with Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito to form a projected Balkan federation — without Stalin's permission. It led to Tito's expulsion from the Soviet Bloc in 1948 and to Dimitrov's disgrace. That was glossed over by his death, in a Moscow hospital, shortly thereafter.

As I strolled back to the ponderous Hotel Balkan, a group of young men approached me, apparently out of sheer curiosity, undaunted by the Zhivkov warning against cultivating Westerners. One introduced himself as "Dzim – a poet" adding, "We are all poets in Bulgaria." He recited several verses, one of which translated as:

> What could you say, History
> From your red pages?
> We were speechless people
> Like beasts in the slaughterhouse
> What would you say, History
> About our hanging around in queues?
> We ceased to be human
> Once we put on our uniforms.

I never encountered Dzim again. But after learning more about Todor Zhivkov's enmity toward free spirits, it occurred to me that Dzim could have placed himself in danger — consorting with a foreigner so casually on that soft Sofia evening.

In late December 1963, I drove again to Sofia to attend what turned out to be the last Stalinist-style show trial in the Soviet Bloc. A fifty-six-year-old diplomat, Ivan-Asen Khristov Georgiev, was accused of spying for the United States. Television cameras in the somber Ministry of Justice building were trained on the judge, the accused and jurors. Spectators provided histrionic hisses and boos. We foreign reporters were the clueless extras. Staying well behind the scenes was the director,

Todor Zhivkov. With a background in amateur drama, he may have relished staging a theatrical trial. He had played an important role in Bulgaria's first show trial fourteen years earlier.

Show trials of political enemies were flagrant features of Stalin's rule in Russia in the 1930s. They were repeated by his satraps in Albania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria between 1949 and 1952, but had been abandoned after Stalin's death in 1953. This made the Georgiev spectacle a jarring anachronism.

Underlying it, apparently, was Zhivkov's urge to put forth Bulgaria as the most loyal and doctrinaire of the Soviet Union's satellites. He boasted that the two countries "breathe with the same lungs, and the same blood flows in our veins."

The Communists seized power as a party of 8,000 in 1944 at the beginning of the Soviet occupation. Under Russian tutelage, the party ballooned to 460,000. Trained as a printer, Zhivkov joined the party's youth organization, Komsomol, in the late 1920s. At the end of the war he was the political commissar for the Chavdar Brigade of the nascent Communist resistance called the People's Liberation Insurgent Army. Then he became police chief of Sofia, and then commander of the People's Militia. One action for which he was responsible was to arrest and subject at least 3,000 opponents of the Communists to sham trials. Of these 2,138 were executed — far more than in any other country in the new Soviet Bloc. Many more opponents were subsequently killed without trial.

Zhivkov then served as the main interrogator in the preparation of Bulgaria's great show trial in 1949 of Traicho Kostov, an intellectual who a quarter of a century earlier had co-founded the Communist party and was its chief during the war. The interrogation, combined with torture, featured a form of near drowning — prolonged dousing with icy water from a fire hose in his narrow cell. After four months of this Kostov signed a confession dictated by his jailers. But in the last days of his trial he confounded them, declaring: "I retract my statements made during the interrogation." He was executed December 16, 1949. A few days later as if to underline who called the tune in Bulgaria, *Rabotnichesko Delo* ("Workers' Cause", the Party paper) printed the name of Stalin no less than three hundred times.

Like the Kostov spectacle the Georgiev trial was well rehearsed. Following a one-hour rendition of the indictment by the chief justice, Georgiev testified in a hoarse, high-pitched voice, pleading guilty and declaring, "I beg you to give me the heaviest penalty." Prompted by Angel Velev, the chief justice, the defendant rambled on for several hours about his traitorous deeds and multiple mistresses. Apparently recruited during a posting in Paris, he said he made contact with the Central

Intelligence Agency on his arrival in 1956 in New York where he took up duties at the Bulgarian mission to the United Nations.

Singled out in Georgiev's indictment was Cyril E. Black, a Princeton professor of Slavic studies closely associated since boyhood with Bulgaria — including the American College of Sofia, a high school which his father helped found. It became apparent that the broader targets of the prosecution included anyone with intellectual associations (Georgiev joined the Communist Party in 1928 as a student and graduated from law school in 1932) and, especially, American connections. Thus the court repeated themes of the Kostov trial. Among the thirty called to testify the first day were a former foreign minister and the minister of culture.

Next morning the defendant was allowed to say that his motive for espionage was "the human tragedy of our movement that expressed itself in the cult of personality" — a euphemism for Stalinism. He also talked about his mistresses — ten of them — including two whom he said were flown by the Central Intelligence Agency from Sofia for visits to New York. The CIA had paid him a total of $200,000 over a period of eight years, he asserted.

Meanwhile violence a few blocks away in front of the American Legation in Slavjanska Street overtook the drama of the trial. Phalanxes of demonstrators shouted slogans, "Down with American Imperialism!" and "Shame on American espionage!" Altogether several thousand, they pelted the building with rocks and other missiles. Windows were shattered up to the second floor. Burly men smashed and overturned four embassy automobiles. Two U.S. diplomats were punched and kicked. John Anderson, husband of the absent American minister and a professional photographer, went undaunted into the street to snap pictures. After an hour militiamen, some on horseback, dispersed the demonstrators. A station wagon came to collect large leftover placards with slogans. Members of the Bulgarian protocol service arrived to measure window frames for replacement. One remarked "there is not enough glass in Sofia right now to fix them."

The third day of the trial brought a revelation by Georgiev that he identified himself with the ideas of Milovan Djilas, the great Yugoslav dissident. Like Djilas, the defendant said, he thought there was "a class struggle in Socialist countries" between the workers and peasants on the one hand and "intellectuals." Judge Angel Velev asked the defendant if he had espoused such views during his tenure as rector of the University of Sofia during the early 1950s. Georgiev responded with a laugh saying, "Having in mind that you are the presiding judge and that I am the accused expecting the death penalty, this discussion is very unequal." The audience then broke into laughter at the gallows humor.

On the fifth day the prosecution called for the death penalty, listing some of Georgiev's alleged betrayals: details of the rift between the Soviet Union and Communist China, including the forced withdrawal of Soviet submarines from their base in Albania; the 1962 Cuba crisis; and disclosing the code used by the Bulgarian UN delegation to his handlers. The verdict was read December 31. Georgiev was executed by a firing squad five days later.

Over the next year I returned every few months. Bulgarian-American relations were in a deep freeze. Even Sofia's premier hostelry, the ponderous Balkan on the corner of Georgi Dimitrov Boulevard (now Knyaginya Maria Louisa), was repellant. I got sick repeatedly after eating there.

A moment of rare warmth came in the reception of a group of American heart specialists who attracted standing room attendance at their lectures. The hosts presented them with a 5-volume Bulgarian study which, they told Dr. Eliot Corday, of the University of California, demonstrated that strawberries — the national fruit — had "no deleterious effect on the human heart." In a whispered aside, a Bulgarian scientist informed Dr. Corday that 40 percent of Bulgarian strawberries carried hookworm parasites. "I think you may have your priorities mixed up," the American whispered back.

There were hints of improvements: a field of oil wells opened near Pleven (although Bulgaria never produced more than 3 percent of the oil it consumed); state bakeries resumed production of *dobrudgja* the nation's favored white bread; state farm wages doubled to the equivalent of $1.31 a day; relations improved with Greece in trade, communications and transport (telephone and airline connections still went by way of Belgrade in the summer of 1964). Overtures were made for better relations with Yugoslavia and Turkey.

At the end of the year, I went back to bid farewell to Eugenie Anderson who had maintained poise and dignity though months of official snubs and insults. She had done so, she said, because she detected "a great well of affection, respect, confidence" for America in Bulgaria. She was right.

For reasons I never grasped, Bulgarian officials repeatedly urged me to visit the town of Gabrovo, renowned for its festival of Bulgarian humor. They recited characterstic Gabrovo japes about stinginess (man from Gabrovo chooses slim woman as bride because she takes up less space and doesn't need so much cloth for a dress). I did not go to Gabrovo. But I registered jokes, the common currency of Eastern Europe aside from dollars and deutschmarks. They could be transferred instantly and were usually as good value in their Bulgarian version as in their Romanian with only the slightest change of local color.

Todor Zhivkov, who had a reputation as a hick, was known as "the pumpkin," was also a subject of jokes. In one his mother succeeded in a scientific experiment by crossing a pumpkin with a loudspeaker to create a viable hybrid. Of course there was nothing really funny about him and jokes featuring him sometimes brought ghastly trouble to the teller.

It was a Romanian joke that got me banned for life from Bulgaria — twice. I had appended the tale to a lengthy piece for *The New York Times* in early 1965 about the Romanian Communist leadership's drive for a limited amount of independence within the Soviet Bloc — writing that the joke illustrated how Romanians had begun to feel about this development at the time when conformity was still the rule.

The joke: The Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev, Romania's Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Bulgaria's Todor Zhivkov meet in a Bucharest restaurant. They order *ciorba* — the sour Balkan soup made with lemon juice and fermented wheat bran — served usually with some kind of meat. The waiter asks whether they want "separate checks, or all together." They declare that they are independent Socialist leaders and will each pay for his own. The waiter says: "All right. That makes: Gheorghiu-Dej, 25 lei; Khrushchev, 15 lei; and Zhivkov, 10 lei." "But we all had ciorba — why the different prices?" Khrushchev demands. The waiter replies: "Because you had different ciorbas. Gheorghiu Dej had tongue and brains. That's 25 lei. Khrushchev had tongue but no brains – that's 15 lei. And Zhivkov had no tongue and no brains…."

Months passed. Then in early 1965 the Bulgarian press attaché who had been so nice in issuing me travel visas made his way the half block from his embassy on Proleterskih Brigada to our flat with a sad face to inform me that I was, alas, barred — indefinitely — from his country because of the Romanian joke.

Astonishingly I encountered Zhivkov only a few months later. That was in Bucharest in March 1965 at the funeral for Gheorghiu-Dej. Following the ceremony, there was a reception for honored guests in an ornate anteroom of the Grand National Assembly. A sly Romanian diplomat slipped me into the chamber among such dignitaries as China's Chou En-Lai and Yugoslavia's Aleksandar Ranković, Russia's Anastas Mikoyan and other Communist luminaries making small talk, laughing occasionally — all except Todor Zhivkov, who was the sole head of party and state and thus probably the highest ranking of the foreign guests. He sat on a chair next to the wall. Nobody stopped to speak to him. Having just been barred from his country, I decided not to myself.

Later it occurred to me that, while Zhivkov may not have been the most brilliant of Communist leaders of his day, he succeeded in holding on to power longer than almost all of them — outlived

them, too. He didn't accomplish that just by eating yogurt (the supposed secret of Bulgarian longevity). After his champion Khrushchev was ousted in 1964, Zhivkov swiftly transferred allegiance to Leonid Brezhnev (who, like him, was closer to the Stalin mode).

I had not thought to challenge the Zhivkov ban when aboard the Dunaj, a Soviet river steamer as a passenger when it docked at Ruse, a port on the southern banks of the Danube since Roman times. A young woman wearing a brown "Balkanturist" uniform jacket came on board to invite passengers ashore. I murmured to her that I was officially banned from the Bulgarian People's Republic. "Never mind," she said, "for four dollars you are welcome."

Writing about that visit, perhaps injudiciously, I did not mention the ban. But sure enough, the unfortunate press attaché in Belgrade was subsequently ordered to protest to me. I apologized as best I could: "I am really sorry to have caused you a problem. But I was invited."

Zhivkov, I learned, was only 42 when as a result of a successful courtship of Nikita Khrushchev, seventeen years his senior, he gained full power in the Party and government. In that same year, 1956, Bulgaria's supreme court ordered the annulment of the Traicho Kostov sentence and declared his rehabilitation. Yet Zhivkov, still in the Stalinist mode and without any apparent provocation, ordered not only the reopening of a prison for political prisoners on the Danube island of Belene but also the establishment of a new camp in 1959 to incarcerate more than 1,000 political prisoners at Lovech, 80 miles northeast of Sofia. This was the very moment Khrushchev was dismantling the vast Soviet gulag prison complex. The timing, in view of Zhivkov's new loyalty, seemed grotesque. Not until April 1962 was Lovech shut down as quietly as it opened (about which, more later). At the same time Musala, Bulgaria's highest mountain, named Stalin Peak in 1949, was given back its original name.

Zhivkov had a vengeful streak. He demonstrated it following his effort to subordinate an acclaimed writer, Georgi Markov, about the time I arrived in the country. At age thirty-three Markov had won the country's highest literary award for his novel, entitled *Men*. Three years later, in 1963, Zhivkov summoned him and other writers to join him on a mountain hike. The Party leader pretended that he liked creative people. But as he cosseted them he simultaneously sought to hobble them. Markov, among the few to resist his blandishments, left the country in 1969 — defying the dictator's warning about going to the West. He was then blacklisted in Sofia. From London, he broadcast revelations of experiences with the dictatorship for the BBC and later for Radio Free Europe, both of which had Bulgarian language services. His broadcast themes included vivid descriptions of how Zhivkov subjugated Bulgarian writers and artists and then subjugated them to

Party conformity. As his broadcasts continued, Markov started receiving telephoned death threats. On September 7, 1978 – Zhivkov's 67th birthday – Markov was fatally wounded in London by an assassin. The killer, Francesco Gulino. an Italian petty criminal, had been under arrest in Sofia when he was recruited some years before by Zhivkov's State Security service.

For two decades I did not return to Bulgaria. It was no longer part of my beat anyway and besides I did not have many pleasant memories of it. When I once disparaged the Bulgarians in a conversation with Michael B. Petrovich, the eminent Slavicist from the University of Wisconsin he replied gently and memorably: "But you can't think of the Balkans without Bulgaria!"

That stuck in my mind in 1985 when I sought and obtained an assignment from *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* to write a long piece about Bulgaria. I was a bit uneasy as I applied for a visa in Washington, but still curious about a place that had been so repellant. There were new phenomena which triggered the assignment: an allegation that Bulgaria sponsored a plot in 1981 to kill Pope John Paul II; a bloody campaign to de-nationalize and absorb the sizeable Turkish minority; and, finally, Zhivkov's personality cult. After two decades my Balkan soup joke seemed to have been forgotten — no one brought it up and I was again granted a press visa.

There were some pleasant surprises in Sofia. The stolid Balkan Hotel had been refurbished. Bathroom taps were metal instead of the leaky plastic of the 1960s. Restaurant food no longer induced boils. The burgundy-like Gamza wine from the Danube valley had a fresh resinous taste. Sofia had retained its reputation as one of the continent's "greenest" cities – streets lined with maples, elms, black locusts and chestnuts; its architecture a harmonious mix of Byzantine, Turkish and Viennese styles.

Surprising too, was an invitation to a reception at the Bulgarian Officers Club, where a Foreign Ministry official introduced me to General Vladimir Stoychev, bandy-legged and still hearty at age 93. A cavalry officer in both Balkan wars as well as World War I, Stoychev had ridden twice in the Olympic Games — participating in equestrian events not only in the Paris Olympics of 1924, placing 11th out of 99 competitors but also in the Amsterdam Olympics of 1928 when he came in 18th. He did not boast about that, nor about commanding Bulgarian army units fighting the retreating Wehrmacht through Yugoslavia and Hungary to the Austrian alps in May 1945. Rather, when asked what he was proudest of he replied with a big smile, "I was the Stadtkommandant in Kavala in two world wars!" He was referring to the Greek port city. Those were the only moments since the Middle Ages when Bulgaria's rule reached both to the shores of the Black Sea and the Aegean.

By way of an East German friend who had married a Bulgarian, I met Plamen and Tanya Milenkov, he a lawyer and she a landscape architect, and their engaging teenaged daughter and son. They entertained me with a delicious supper — fresh trout that Plamen had caught in a mountain stream and a crisp Targovishte white wine. Later on during a walk a storm came upon us. Tanya shook her dark brown locks and smiling radiantly, raised her face to the raindrops and said, "I love the rain!"

Plamen then told a joke about the Bulgarian homeland that was another expression of ethnocentrism: A cow, being a characteristically curious bovine, wandered from its pasture in the Balkan Mountains to a beach on the Black Sea. In the stomach of the cow a father tapeworm detected the difference in altitude and nudged his tapeworm son saying, "We must go out and see the wonders of this world." They crawl out and the father said to the son: "See that blue up above? That is the sky full of fresh sweet air. And that bright spot above is called the sun. It warms the earth and makes things grow that feed the cow, who feeds us. And that yellow stuff below is sand. It is soft and wonderful to lie on. But now we must go back inside the cow." The son tapeworm complained, "But why, father, when it is so nice here with the warm sunlight and the sand so soft ... why do we have to return to a place that is so dark and dank?" The father tapeworm replied, "Because that is our homeland!"

In retrospect it seems the reason the authorities were willing to receive me was desperation over the bad press they had been getting, not only about the alleged "Bulgarian connection" to the papal assassination plot, but also over unsavory trade in drugs and weapons as well the campaign to "Bulgarize" the country's ethnic minorities. At the very least they could try giving their version of these developments. This rationale seemed to work and, indeed, interviews with high-level officials were proffered.

For instance, Lyuben Gotsev, a deputy foreign minister, acknowledged that "there have been cases in which Kintex (a Bulgarian weapons company) arms have been found in the hands of people who are, as you say, hostile to the United States."

On the domestic level, the drive to absorb all minorities was the most dramatic of all of Zhivkov's initiatives. The aim described by the Politburo member Stanko Todorov, was to create a "single-nationality state," something southeastern Europe had never known in three millennia of recorded history. Zhivkov appeared to have begun in the 1970s with elimination of "Macedonians" as a separate group (the 1946 census had recorded 250,000). He subsequently directed that the thousands of Albanians, Armenians and Roma (Gypsies) had to accept Bulgarian names. In 1984 it was the

turn of the Turks. In a few months one million Turkic people, a tenth of Bulgaria's population, were compelled to Slavicize their names, often at gunpoint. Dozens of resisters were shot. Over a thousand Turkish schools were shut, the Turkish press throttled, even speaking Turkish in public was banned.

The campaign was nearly over by the time I had arrived, but still there were signs of resistance, including deadly bomb explosions. Some of my hosts voiced hatred. "Our Turks don't believe in God, they believe in whisky," a mid-level official sneered.

With Lawrence E. Butler, a young political officer of the U.S. Embassy, I drove into the Rila foothills east of Sofia to look for some Bulgarian Turks. They were easy to find, a team of workers patching the highway. They spoke quite freely. Everyone in their village had recently been forced by armed men to accept a Bulgarian name. One resister was shot, others incarcerated on the Danube island of Belene, they said. When cars passed the men fell silent. They were not getting full pay and probably would be denied the opportunity of better schooling. Would they emigrate if it were possible? "I was born here and I'll die here," said one (in fact 370,000 moved later to Turkey when the border was opened).

Along with his campaign to erase minorities, Zhivkov was promoting nationalism in other venues. A Western diplomat told of his son, enrolled in Bulgarian high school, attending a history lesson taught by an officer-teacher. One day said, "You are not here because of the NATO military threat, but because of this." He then, rolled down a map of medieval Bulgaria encompassing large area of modern-day Greece, Albania, Macedonia and Serbia, as if to say that young Bulgarians should think of restoring "Greater Bulgaria."

Yet most of the young Bulgarians I met had no such nationalistic dreams. Like their contemporaries elsewhere they were interested in jeans and rock music and they tended to say "ciao" or "merci" in place of their native "dovizhdane" or "blagodarya."

Turning back on the road from the foothills, Butler and I came upon several young Bulgarians who were practicing head-butting. This, I was later told, enjoyed a reputation as a sport in a nation where goats, sheep, stags and other butting animals were prevalent. Two in tracksuits grasped each other's shoulders and rammed foreheads. One fell flat with a bleeding brow. The other hopped up and down in triumph.

On the way past large factories and into the capital, the brash young Butler pointed out various sites, sneering, "That's a nuclear target…that's another target…" When I asked what he meant, he explained that he was privy to the U.S. Strategic Air Command maps of Bulgaria with sites marked

for atomic attacks. It dawned on me that he was confiding what were probably military secrets. Much later I learned they were indeed “atomic secrets.”

Another drive took me south of Sofia down the fertile Struma Valley where dozens of men were tilling small neat fields with shovels and hoes. Beside the fields, Soviet-designed Lada cars were parked, vehicles owned by the farmers. These were private plots licensed by the Communist government, comprising only 13 percent of the land, but 28 percent of total production. I remembered what a Serbian friend, the newspaperman Saša Nenadović, told me: “Bulgarians are better at garden farming than Serbs — they migrated up the West Morava (a river in central Serbia) and our farmers were jealous because they grew more on the same kind of land.” Zhivkov, perhaps comporting with his peasant origins, was credited in the latter half of his career with a policy of leniency toward farmers, encouraging individual enterprise.

A third trip took me northeast to the village of Pravets, where in 1911 Zhivkov was born. Unsurprisingly the 33-mile route had become the country’s first, and for a long time only, superhighway. Through his targeted largesse, what had been a village of farmers was transformed into a model town with a new high school, hotel and up-to-date dairy farm. A large bust of the native son dominated the town square. The town’s new Culture Palace contained a museum with an exhibit tracing his life in photographs and 29 volumes of his collected “works” such as his *New Views and Approaches Concerning the Framing and Implementation of the Techno-Scientific Policy*. In addition, it became the home of Bulgaria’s pioneer computer factory. In 1982 it produced the country’s first personal computer, an IBM clone named the Pravets.

Lawrence Butler, the perennial wise guy, called the Pravets “the world’s first wood-burning computer,” but he was way off the mark. In fact Bulgaria, one of the smallest of the 10 members of the Soviet Bloc’s Council for Mutual Economic Aid, supplied 40 percent of its computers, generating $13 billion. Moreover it was John Atanasoff, a young physics instructor at Iowa State University — son of a Bulgarian immigrant — who conceived the crucial element of a digital computer in 1937.

Zhivkov had boasted of transforming Bulgaria into “the Japan of the Balkans” — a vast overreach. Still, there had been progress. The average wage had gone up to the equivalent of $240 a month. Shop windows were full. Traffic jammed some streets. A quarter of the country’s electric power was produced by nuclear plants. But the unusually harsh winter of 1984-1985 came as a blow to the rigid economic planners and power outages and food shortages ensued.

A young West German technician who traveled widely in Bulgaria to service advanced machine tools told me: “They are still fifteen to twenty years behind us and will stay there because they have no way of developing their own products.” He blamed this on a lack of incentive, because Bulgarian electronics engineers earned little more than ordinary factory workers. But the German said some Bulgarian enterprises were “as clean as those in Stuttgart and working beautifully.”

For a moment at the end of the 1970s, some Bulgaria watchers wondered whether there was a Zhivkov dynasty in the offing. When his daughter Lyudmila graduated from the university in 1966, he recruited her into the Communist Party. Less than a decade later she was appointed head of the state committee for culture. At age thirty-sex, she became a member of the Party’s governing Politburo. Yet she was also given great credit for fostering the arts and — quite the opposite of her father in the 1960s —for enabling artists to travel and study abroad. She initiated the construction of the National Palace of Culture in the capital. Her father commemorated her by naming the huge structure for her after her death at age thirty-nine under still unexplained circumstances, in 1981. (These and other tributes to her were erased after the Communist system crashed.) In fact, the commemoration of his daughter coincided with Zhivkov’s gradual political demise.

After having ruled as party secretary for over three decades and after having survived the years of Stalin Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and after having been named *Hero of the Soviet Union*, Zhivkov’s lucky charm in the Kremlin had ceased to work. His career as Moscow’s Balkan darling was over. In 1984, Zhvikov’s long-planned trip to West Germany was cancelled by Mikhail Gorbachev, who had become increasingly annoyed with him. He told Zhivkov that Moscow would no longer accept shoddy goods from Sofia and would cut back shipments of subsidized Soviet oil, which Bulgaria was reprocessing and then selling on world markets at a much higher price. Still he held on for another six years.

In the end Zhivkov was, like Erich Honecker in East Berlin, forced out of office by his closest party colleagues in a Politburo meeting. That occurred November 10, 1989, just as the Berlin Wall was collapsing. He had to relinquish his position as head of state at the same time. Less than a month after resigning he was expelled from the Party, accused of abusing his powers and placed under arrest on charges of fraud and nepotism.

In 1990, a government inquiry disclosed that when Zhivkov reopened the Belene prison camp it was partly to combat “hooliganism,” a euphemism for Western-influenced trends in music and dress. When it was closed, 166 of its “incorrigible” inmates became the first inmates of his new secret camp at Lovech. Over the next four years 1,500 were incarcerated, of whom 151 died. One of them

was Alexander (Sasho Sladura) Nikolov, a well-known former symphony violinist who had been imprisoned for telling political jokes. He was beaten to death in 1961 by Nikolai Gazdov, a sadistic camp guard.

When questioned about Lovech in 1990 by a military prosecutor, Zhivkov blamed the Soviet Union as being the model for such practices. He said: “Today I would absolutely object to such camps.” The prosecutor noted there was no paper trail implicating the defendant with regard to the camps because decisions on such matters were communicated by telephone. But a former Lovech prisoner testified that he had witnessed a Zhivkov visit to the camp during which the leader said of the prisoners, “These are weeds that should be cut without mercy at the roots.”

Neither Zhivkov nor his deputy Minister of Interior, Col. Gen. Mircho Spasov, the man directly responsible for the camps, were punished for these camps. Spasov retired comfortably to a large villa in the Vitosha village of Dragalevtsy. Zhivkov was convicted merely of embezzling government funds and sentenced in 1992 to seven years in prison. Due to his age and frail health, he was allowed to serve his term under house arrest in his comfortable hill villa in Boyana, a mile from Dragalevtsy.

Todor Zhivkov, died in August 1998. No one was ever brought to justice for the crimes of Lovech or other persecutions ordered by or under Zhivkov.

About that time I met Radostina Konstantinova, a Bulgarian journalist, in Washington. In 2001 she helped me when I visited Sofia to investigate human trafficking in the Balkans. Radostina and her parents then extended the generous hospitality characteristic of their nation and introduced me to the enchantments of such historic Bulgarian places as Plovdiv (the ancient Philippoupolis) and Nesebar, the ancient Black Sea port.

Sofia, the city I knew under the Communists, had changed. Gone was the tomb of Georgi Dimitov. It proved more difficult to raze in 1999 (by the United Democratic Forces government of Ivan Kostov) than it had been to raise by the Communists half a century earlier: a total of four demolitions and sweeps by bulldozers. The site, Square of Ninth of September (the day of liberation in 1944) was renamed Square of Prince Alexander of Battenberg — along with many other street names associated with Communist rule.

Zhivkov, too, was virtually forgotten in the Bulgaria of the twenty-first century. But was I rid of my Balkan vampire?

In July 2009, there were parliamentary elections and, out of the 3,234 candidates, 142 were revealed by a special commission to have worked for Zhivkov’s state secret police, Darzhavna

Sigurnost. One was Ahmed Dogan, leader of the the Turkish MDL party. Another was the president of the country, Georgi Parvanov.

The following month there were elections for a new prime minister. The clear winner was Boyko Borisov. I looked up his biography. He had been a general in the Darzhavna Sigurnost and a karate expert. His first job following the Communist period was serving as the chief body guard for Todor Zhivkov.

ROADS LEADING TO ROMANIA

There was Romania, home of the Dacians and the Getae in ancient times, stretching from the Danube in the west to the Black Sea in the east with the ridges of the Carpathians, where, across the middle, part brown bears and wolves still roam. Its veins of precious metals, rich fields and valleys invited invasions by Persians, Romans, Goths, Huns and later Slavs, Magyars and Turks. Roman invaders under Trajan introduced colonists who brought a vulgar Latin to the Romanian lands and created a proto-Romanian language, albeit flavored with a sprinkling of Slavic words injected by neighboring Serbs, Bulgars and Russians.

Romania had been on the map of Europe for scarcely a century when I came to the Balkans. As a young monarchy, it allied itself in 1877 to Russia against the Turks; remained neutral for two years in World War I, then allied itself to France – emerging with huge territorial gains at the expense of Bulgaria, Hungary and Russia. But it lost some of these for siding with the Axis in World War II.

Many Romanians liked to think of themselves as Latinate and to consider Bucharest the "Paris of the East." But in their modern history, they were more often allied with Germans (and Nazis) or Russians (and Communists).

1963-1966

In late June 1963, my first official call in Bucharest as the new Balkans correspondent of *The New York Times* was at the office of Dr. Petre Iosif, Director of Press Affairs at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was then housed in a requisitioned hotel on the capital's broad Bulevardul Republicii. I had arranged through the Romanian Embassy in Belgrade, my Balkan base, to call on him. I drove the 340 — Balkan — miles in about ten hours.

Iosif, a slender bespectacled man in his fifties, received me courteously, expressing the wish that "this would be the beginning of a good relationship." I responded that it would be good if he would inquire into the fate and situation of Fernanda Friedman-Stefanescu, who had been arrested as a "spy" for *The New York Times* in about 1950 and who then disappeared. I was tasked on this matter by the Foreign Editor in New York, Emanuel R. Freedman, who insisted that I raise the issue. He heard of her from a letter sent by a Romanian woman who was released from prison after having been incarcerated with Fernanda. (Decades later it occurs to me that some might imagine a familial connection between E.R. Freedman and Fernanda Friedman, but I am sure there was none.)

Petre Iosif frowned. Taken aback by my blunt-verging-on-rude opening, he laconically replied: “I will look into it.” After a pause we then discussed the current state of world affairs and my general lack of knowledge of or experience in Romania. A few days later he said, “She does not exist.”

In those days the country spelled its name R *u* m a n i a, partially in deference to the Russians, then the dominant power in the region who traditionally spelled it with a “u” (in Cyrillic) as did most European nations. So did *The New York Times*.

The change to an “o,” as in R*o*mania, was just beginning as the quietly determined and independent-minded leadership worked to strengthen the nation’s self-image as descendants of Rome and the Romans. Their main argument was the conquest of their land by Emperor Trajan in A.D. 106 and its subsequent designation by some colonists as “Romania.”

The 100 degree heat was suffocating. I was lodged in the Hotel Lido, whose claim to renown was a swimming pool with a wave-making apparatus that created the impression of a turbulent little sea, and made sustained swimming arduous. Its restaurant was unmemorable.

A tour of the capital was arranged with a Foreign Ministry attaché to guide me, a slight balding fellow who introduced himself as E. T. de Herbay. It became apparent that he was not a regime sympathizer. Driving through a fancy neighborhood northeast of Piata Victoriei — the Square of Victory — I asked who lived there.

“*Les hautes volailles*!” — his words for the high and mighty.

Who lives there now?

“*Les hautes volailles*. But different.”(Seven years later E.T. Herbay wrote me a letter from London where he had arrived after getting a job at the British embassy and using a trip to England to seek asylum.)

That evening I met Jack Shaw, the sensitive and sensible diplomat who was deputy chief of mission in the U.S. Legation. He said that there was a strain in Bucharest’s relations with Moscow, growing out of Romania’s gradual but steady pursuit of self-determination while remaining within the Soviet Bloc. As Jack spoke, Vasily V. Kuznetsov, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs was flying unannounced from the Soviet capital on an urgent mission to obtain a clearer picture of what the government of President Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was up to. In fact the Romanians waited nine more months to make their declaration of — limited — Independenta in the Soviet bloc.

Petre Iosif had meanwhile arranged that I be spirited out of town to the beaches of the Black Sea, a tourist destination even then for Scandinavian tourists bent on bargains. A car would take me, with a guide-interpreter. After breakfast at the Lido facing the broad Magheru Boulevard — Bucharest’s

north-south thoroughfare — a short woman in dark glasses approached me and inquired, “Mr. Binder?” She introduced herself as my guide; her enormous bosom was barely contained in an embroidered peasant blouse.

We were driven by a taciturn chauffeur in an old Volga Gaz-21 over potholed roads. Several hours out of town she asked if I had heard of the sudden arrival of the Soviet official at Bucharest’s Baneasa Airport. His name began with “K” she said. My heart fell. What was I doing on the hot, dusty Baragan steppe when a high-ranking Soviet official had just landed to browbeat Romanian leaders? The Volga driver dumped us at a shabby Constanta hotel. The bosom explained that on short notice it was impossible to find accommodations at the beach tourist hotels just up the coast because it was the height of the tourist season. Why short notice? Years later it occurred to me that the reason he had arranged the trip to the Black Sea Coast was to get me, the sole Western correspondent in Romania at that moment, out of the capital for the duration of the hypersensitive Kuznetsov visit.

After an indifferent dinner in Constanta I went to my room to listen to a shortwave news broadcast. Sure enough, Kuznetsov’s arrival in Romania was announced. I looked for a telephone in the room. None visible. I trotted down the corridor to the room of the bosom. Yes, she had a telephone. I asked her about Russian Deputy Foreign Minister. She said she knew nothing about foreign relations. Could we switch rooms? “But yours is bigger,” she said. “I need to call New York,” I said. “It could take hours.” She moved.

It took 70 minutes to get through to the foreign desk and I transmitted 200 words about what was going on between the Soviet Union and increasingly obstreperous Romania. The short report was published — “getting it on the record” — which we thought was important in those days in mid-Cold War. These were sensitive days in the Cold War as Romania pursued a degree of self-determination, especially in economic affairs, within the Soviet Bloc.

Next morning we drove a few miles up the coast to the Neptune Beach. Far more than filling out her bikini, the guide lay down in the hot sand and dozed off. I tiptoed to water’s edge to test the tepid Black Sea waters, waded far out until waist deep, soon gave up on swimming but began to fear sunburn. Hopping tender-footed on the hot sand I retreated to the shade of a beach house where a swarm of sand fleas attacked me. I roused the guide and upset her, saying I had to get back to Bucharest.

Probably she had counted on several pleasant – and paid – days at the Black Sea. But I was thinking about Ovid, who in 8 AD was banished 747 miles eastward from Rome to Tomis, the

present day Constanta, by Emperor Augustus. Miserable away from Rome he wrote poetic laments for a decade. I didn't want to walk in Ovid's footsteps.

During the bumpy drive back the guide grasped my hand and made friendly noises. We chatted desultorily. But I declined more of her company. The driver dropped her at the door of her cottage. I heard later she married a Swiss diplomat and moved to Geneva.

In those days the main roads had guards posted every 10 miles at candy-striped barriers with guard houses at which a traveler was expected to stop and produce identity papers and travel documents. I learned later this was a control system introduced throughout the Balkans a thousand years ago in the Byzantine era. Now it was practiced only in Romania — not for foreigners, but for Romanians.

But there were large holes in the system, as I saw one morning at the Romania-Yugoslav crossing at Moravita, 40 miles south of Timisoara. On the eastern side stood a Gypsy caravan — brilliantly decorated horse-drawn covered wagons accompanied by lowing cattle and tethered goats — the clan of perhaps 120 people. A dozen border guards stood about, some with rifles, others with submachine guns. A watchtower manned by men with binoculars stood above the stubbly field where the Gypsy carts were drawn up. The chief of the clan attended by several stocky women in kerchiefs was arguing with the commander of the border detachment, whose lieutenant's pips gleamed in the sun. Children capered and caterwauled. All at once as if at a signal (I did not detect any) they dashed toward the frontier barriers and through them and over them. The lieutenant shouted an order and guards started after the youngsters who were fleet as foxes. Several allowed themselves to be caught in no man's land and were being dragged back when their mothers ran forward pell-mell screaming imprecations as if the children were being executed on the spot.

The guards lost control, grabbing at this child, that mother. The lieutenant's head swiveled back and forth like a gun turret. Suddenly the Gypsy chieftain shouted a command that sounded like "Haieee!" and swung aboard a wagon. Instantly the whole caravan shot forth — horses, cows, tethered goats, grandmothers, grandfathers — galloping in a cloud of dust and drumbeats of shoes and hooves. They were past the border in a minute or so. The lieutenant running behind stopped at the raised candy-striped frontier bar, shouting curses as they disappeared into Yugoslav territory. I passed through in record time in the opposite direction beneath the red-blue-gold flag flapping in the breeze with its Socialist Romanian symbols of something for everybody: wheat sheaves, an oil well, industrial smokestacks, some Carpathian pines and, of course, the Red Star of the new Bethlehem.

Gypsies, a distinctive people with their own ancient culture, came to form a part of Romania's as well after had arrived in the fourteenth century on a long migratory journey from northern India. Most were slaves until the middle of the nineteenth century. Regardless of their origins, Gypsies created confusion in Romanian nomenclature by calling themselves "Romani "and their language "Roma". Even their number is highly uncertain. Demographers have estimated anywhere from 200,000 to 2,000,000 Romanian Gypsies. Romanian culture is unthinkable without them, beginning with Gypsy orchestras and Gypsy musical repertoire. Intermarriage inevitably occurred (Eftimie Iliescu, mother, of Romania's President Ion Iliescu (1990-1994, 2000-2004) was said to be a Gypsy.)

My initial journey in 1963 had taken me on a northerly route below the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, through Transylvania and then down the narrow Prahova valley to Bucharest.

For variety, I started back by a southern route. Summer storms had suddenly transformed streets into water-filled trenches. Fate stopped me fifteen miles west of the capital in a place called Slobozia de Sus, which translated as Upper Slobozia. That immediately brought to mind "Lower Slobovia," the mythical land of misery the cartoonist Al Capp had created in his Li'l Abner comic strip. I would never see Lower Slobozia because the Steyr Fiat station wagon of *The New York Times* was stuck in two feet of mud in Upper Slobozia. (Slobozie, I learned, deriving from Slavic-infused Romanian for "freedom" was a designation for a recently colonized village on the flat Baragan plain that had once been a target of incursions by Tatars and then Ottomans. Freedom from taxation was meant to encourage resettlement. Romania and neighboring Moldova have a total of twenty-six localities designated Slobozia.)

It took several hours and some dollars to get the Fiat wrenched free from the embrace of Slobozian mud.

In September 1964, I was informed in Belgrade that Fernanda Friedman-Stefanescu was reachable at a certain address in Bucharest. I hastened this time by way of Timisoara and Brasov, marveling at the autumn colors of pale yellow clouds and orange aspen and linden leaves swirling on the highway pavement in the Olt valley near Fagaras. I had taken all the hard cash I could withdraw from the bank in Belgrade – about $600. Perhaps the message to Petre Iosif had worked!

All I had was a street number in a poor district of south Bucharest. There I found an emaciated woman of about sixty in a cheap flowered dress with reddish hair and sad eyes. I drove her uptown to the glassed-in the street side breakfast room of the Athenee Palace — the hotel of legend, romance and several novels.

Fernanda, who had worked before World War II for the newspaper *Dimineata* (Morning) headed for this same hotel with translations of (Communist) newspaper articles for William H. Lawrence, a foreign correspondent of *The Times* (later a prominent White House correspondent). She was his accredited stringer when she was detained in 1950 by Securitate police. Because of the translations she was convicted of "espionage for *The New York Times*" and sentenced to hard labor. Part of her fourteen years in the Romanian gulag was with pick and shovel excavating forty-mile canal from Cernavoda on the lower Danube to Constanta, cutting the distance to the Black Sea by 250 miles.

More than 60,000 prisoners worked on it from 1949 to 1953 when the gulag was closed down. Thousands of them perished. (The canal project was restarted in 1976 under President Nicolae Ceausescu and completed in 1987.)

Late in August, Fernanda said, she was called to the office of her last prison in Miercurea Ciuc, in Transylvania, given a one-way train ticket to take her 156 miles to Bucharest and discharged. Arriving late in the evening she slept a few hours at Baneasa Station in the northwestern part of town then begged enough to take the streetcar the four miles to her former apartment in the southeast.

There she learned her husband had divorced her. Strangers occupied the flat. She had no choice beyond joining three other former prisoners to share a single room and to sleep in shifts on the single bed. Fernanda was unable to recover any of her former possessions. All that remained from her previous life was a ring with semi-precious stones, stored with a relative. When she was done I slipped her an envelope containing $500 under the Athenee cafe's marble topped table and asked if she would consider emigrating to Israel?

"I don't believe in Judaism," she said.

"There are a lot of Romanians in Israel and I doubt if all of them are religious Jews," In those days Romania was selling its remaining Jews, some 250,000, to Israel, for cash and for Jaffa oranges — the equivalent of about $4,000 each.

Through the U.S. Embassy I contacted an Israeli organization that was paying for emigration of Romanian Jews with exports of citrus juice, flying them aboard "Juice Airlines" to Rome for processing and then to Israel. Fernanda agreed to apply. A week later I received a message from Rome saying she had arrived safely and was being processed by Jewish Agency for Israel. Back in Belgrade I cabled the information to New York, adding that I thought *The Times* owed Mrs. Stefanescu a lot of money.

Several weeks later I received a letter from Clifton R. Daniel, an assistant managing editor, who wrote that the paper "had no legal obligation" and did not owe Fernanda a penny because "she had

not been hired by New York" But, considering the plight I had described – they would send her "a gratuity" of $5,000. That worked out to a dollar a day for the time she had spent behind bars on behalf of *The New York Times*.

I wrote Fernanda and offered sympathies that the newspaper was treating her so stingily. I sent her $100 every several months. She replied with effusive greetings and a present for my two daughters — a pair of knitted stockings or a toy. She wrote she did not care much for Israeli society, that as a city woman she dreaded ending up in a small village, adding, "Although I suffered so much in my country, I am longing for it. There I was for awhile so happy! There are thousands of years since then…" She also asked a question I could not answer: "If The Times had not had a legal obligation, why were you sent to help me?" (In 1988 I received a message from a Times colleague that she had remarried and was living in Holon, near Tel Aviv. I tried to contact her. A niece wrote that Fernanda had died, aged eighty-one.)

Later I paid a courtesy call on Petre Iosif. He invited me to dinner at Cina, a historic garden restaurant favored by intellectuals opposite the old Royal Palace.

I had just read a novel by Petru Dimitriu, about pre-war, wartime and post-war Romania published after the author went into exile in France. One of the main figures was a Communist who had been fighting Franco with an International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. He sounded quite like Petre Iosif.

Other Romanians told me Petre Iosif was born in Chisinau (Kishinev) the capital of Bessarabia and, like many prewar-underground Romanian Communists, was Jewish. So after dinner at Cina, I asked, "Were you born in Chisinau?"

"No."

"Were you in the Spanish civil war?"

"No."

"That's funny, I heard you were."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was."

"Are you Jewish?"

Petre Iosif exploded: "Why are you asking me these personal questions?"

"I just read about this figure in a novel about Romania in the war. And he sounded familiar." After a long pause, he said softly, "Yes, I was what you asked."

("Basically he was a nice guy," a contemporary, Mircea Raceanu, told me decades later.)

I reflected on him later with some sympathy. He was after all a committed Communist, one of the less than 1,000 Romanians who made up the — illegal — pre-war party, a third of whom were in prison and many of whom were Jewish in an anti-Semitic society.

1965

Journeying frequently from Belgrade to Bucharest and beyond I experienced the Romania ruled by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the party chief and head of state. He had freed most of the political prisoners locked up before and during his rule, eased restrictions in the arts and improved relations with Western countries. By the time he died of cancer March 19, 1965, aged sixty-three, he had led Romania to a degree of independence within the Communist bloc and enjoyed equally correct relations with the newly bitter archrivals, China and the Soviet Russia.

Five days later I attended the splendid funeral ceremony in the ornate parliament building which featured such notable guests as Premier Chou En Lai from Beijing and President Anastas Mikoyan from Moscow. I surprised to be invited backstage to an elaborate reception with cocktails and canapés, where the opportunity offered itself to engage the Chinese Prime Minister in conversation. It went something like this:

"I am a correspondent from *The New York Times*."

"Go away from me, you damned Yankee imperialist! (pause, grinning) No actually you Yankee imperialists helped us come to power."

"I would like to request an interview."

"I am not here for an interview."

"Where are you going from here?"

"To Albania."

"Could you take me with you?"

"There is no room on the plane."

Every town and village in Romania was still paying tribute to Gheorghiu-Dej with black bunting and funeral wreaths when, five days after the state funeral I drove about forty miles east on the flat Baragan plain to the town of Urziceni to visit the Red Banner state dairy farm. I was accompanied to the cow stalls by a Foreign Ministry minder and a senior official of the farm. Idly, I asked a dairyman, "Do you know the name of the president of Romania?"

Behind me the minder and the farm official softly chanted, "Chivu Stoica, Chivu Stoica" (a senior Communist who had succeeded Dej to that post five days earlier). But the dairyman, unmindful of

the pomp and hours of attendant coverage of that event by radio and television – and on village loudspeakers — murmured simply, "Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej?" in a softly questioning voice. Subsequent inquiries in the countryside about the names of the country's new rulers elicited similar ignorance or indifference. Later I found this to be true in other East European countries — the poor and downtrodden had no reason to know or care who was running and ruining their lives.

Early in my Romanian days I came to know a Alexandru Ivasiuc, slightly younger than I. Recently released from prison after having served a sentence for leading a political protest, he was working for the United States Legation. He had just married Tita Chiper, a journalist and they gave me delightful snapshots of them performing gymnastic stunts. Ivasiuc also guided me to new young playwrights and poets. He himself was writing an autobiographical novel. I would encounter him and her later.

In the summer of 1964 I drove to several towns in central Romania to report stories accompanied by Emile Guikovaty, the stubby, pixyish correspondent of *Agence France-Presse*, who was in his mid-forties, and a translator, Adina Darian, a tall, strikingly handsome red head who was thirty-one.

I was babbling along about my impressions of — Socialist — Romania formed after three or four visits when Adina spoke up. "You are naïve!" she said in a flat voice. Stung, I asked what she meant. She pursed her lips, "I can't tell you." Repeated pleas failed to draw an explanation. On a later visit I visited her flat at Number 10 Grigora Mora Street and again begged for an explanation of my "naivete." She placed pillows over the telephone and replied in a whisper, "You have no idea how closely we are watched and listened to...." Meaning, but not mentioning the omnipresent officers of the Securitate.

She introduced me to her mother, Venera, widow of a World War I fighter pilot, Dumitru Darian who had shot down a German plane in World War I and thus had a Bucharest street named Aviatorul D. Darian after him.

Over the years I kept in touch with Adina, who also introduced me to the works of major figures in Romanian culture: the poems of Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967), the absurdist satires of Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), a precursor of his countryman, Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994) and the songs of Maria Tanase (1913-1963) the greatest Romanian chanteuse of all time. (She appeared at the 1939 New York World Fair). Her repertoire included folksongs Tanase collected on her tours. Memorable for me was an almost untranslatable song about how ephemeral is life, called *Lume Lume*:

The world, the world
Sister, the world

When will I be fed up with you?
One is born and the other dies….

Another, “A Gypsy Has a Home,” which tells of a “Tzigan” who got drunk and beat his beautiful wife. She leaves him for the Danube town of Califat and meets a wealthy boyar who marries her. Very sad, the Gypsy, accompanied by their two children, searches from town to town until they pass by a large gate in Califat and the children shout, “look, Father, there is our mother!” Distraught she runs to them:

She didn’t need wealth or nice things
She went back to the Gypsy
Even more beautiful than before.

Tanase, herself a great beauty, recorded this wry, fatalistic song in her smoky contralto accompanied by accordion, clarinet violins and cembalo. Maria Tanase died of cancer a few weeks before my first visit to Romania.

Ionesco was an émigré in France, whose absurdist plays had been taboo under the Romanian Communists until 1964 when his play *Rhinoceros* was recognized as conforming with the party line toward Fascism. It was then triumphantly produced at the Comedia Theatre with the actors gradually turning green (the color of the uniforms of Romania’s Fascist Iron Guard) and trampling about like beasts. The prominent director Radu Penciulescu, who quickly added several Cargiale plays to his schedule, told me “The idea is to show that Ionesco descends directly from classic Romanian culture and that the theatre of the absurd is embryonic in Caragiale.”

Later the great Romanian epic *Miorita* — The Little Ewe Lamb — was brought to my attention by Ernest Latham and Kiki Munshi, two U.S. Embassy attaches who had translated the *Miorita* verses into English for a USIA presentation in Bucharest. Like Tanase’s best songs they combined what I would suggest is the spirit of Romania — a combination of the fatalistic with the transcendental and a familiarity with a sense of doom.

The millennium-old epic tells of the lamb bleating a warning to his prosperous Moldavian shepherd that two other shepherds from Transylvania and Vrancea are plotting to murder him and steal his flock. He asks the lamb to tell them to bury him -- near the sheepfold “so that I am still with you.” And to tell his mother and the other sheep he has gone off to marry a princess and —

That at my wedding
Sycamores and firs were my guests
Great mountains for priests

Birds for musicians
Thousands of birds
And stars for torches

The *Miorita* is still sung in different versions by shepherds on the sloping pastures of the Carpathian range that Romanians call Plai. The verse in turn introduced me to the work of a remarkable philosopher, Lucian Blaga (1896–1961) — incidentally a great fan of Maria Tanase - who had developed a theory of Romanian civilization deriving from a mysterious infinity he called "the Mioritic space." Born himself on the edge of the Carpathians, he wrote of the "unconscious spatial horizon" that surrounded the meadows.

He recorded an ancient fable in which heaven was once so close to earth that you could throw a stone and reach it. But the evil tongue of mankind reached up and licked heaven and therefore God lifted it high up out of reach of man.

An artistic sensibility was displayed even in the villages of Moldavia where the peasant houses had walls painted a delicate pastel blue or a pale purple — the colors set off by dark brown, intricately carved gables and shutters. Not to mention the colorfully frescoed exteriors of churches and monasteries of Humor, Neamt and Voronet.

Bit by bit, I became aware of the accomplishments of Romania's artists and writers and counted myself blessed to learn and write about some of them.

Flashing forward a quarter century: Adina had become a film critic of international reknown. In 1989 I was sent to Bucharest and soon called at Grigora Mora Street.

There I learned just how closely the Darians (and countless other Romanians) had been watched and listened to all those years. In 1952 the Darians were forced by the government to give over six downstairs rooms to tenants — some of whom were Securitate officers. Gradually the Darians bought them out room by room until all the tenants were gone by 1974.

Mother and daughter were at home in during the rebellion against the Ceausescu dictatorship when street fighting swept around the house Venera Darian had occupied for half a century. "The house next door is burning," Adina exclaimed trying to persuade her mother to flee with her. "Then I will burn with it," Venera replied. Adina ran across town to safer quarters. Bullets fired by security forces and rebels punched nine big holes into the walls and ceilings of Venera's bedroom.

"My mother is the keeper of the Romanian citadel," Adina softly remarked.

I was twice "banned for life" from Romania. The first because of a story with a satiric edge in a January 1966 edition of the Sunday travel section of the paper about the perils and delights of

driving ALL OVER the Balkans, including to Bucharest. It bore an unfortunate headline: “Rumania’s Roads to Ruin / Motorist Who Breaks Down Should Not Curse Elements, the Land or the People — Just Wait Patiently”. But it took the authorities in Bucharest five months to react.

In the following May the first secretary and the press attaché of the Romanian Embassy in Washington journeyed to New York to see the publisher on behalf of their government. “Wonder why they want to see me?” wondered Arthur Ochs Sulzberger in his 14th floor aerie at 226 West 43rd Street. He asked around and learned that the Romanian state tourist office had just purchased a full-page ad in the paper. The publisher stretched out his hand to greet the diplomats: “Congratulations, I just heard about the ad for tourism!”

Puzzled, one diplomat responded: “We are not here for an advertisement. We are here to tell you that any correspondent of *The New York Times* is welcome in Romania at any time with the exception of David Binder.” This was accompanied by what in the language of diplomacy could be termed a “strong protest” against my article. (This account was relayed to me by the foreign editor who also attended. Instead of having the Romanian diplomats thrown out of his office — if it were a Chicago newspaper, thrown down the stairs — the Romanian diplomats were advised that a different correspondent would soon be visiting Bucharest.)

1976 -1983

However nothing in the Balkans, as I was to be reminded again, is forever (with the possible exception of mud). In September 1976, ten years after the Romanian-Roads-to-Ruin ban, I was invited with a group sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, to Bucharest. (In the meantime I had moved from Belgrade to Bonn in November 1966 and on to Washington in May 1973).We were greeted at Otopeni Airport almost with a red carpet. Our hosts were from the Fundatia Nicolae Titulescu, the Romanian equivalent of the New York-based Council. Nobody mentioned my previous banning.

I looked up Alexandru Ivasiuc, who had risen to prominence after the success of his first novel, *Vestibule*, in 1967, and six more. He was now secretary of Romania’s prestigious Union of Writers. He had separated from Tita Chiper, he told me and was courting several other women including the wife of the foreign minister — living the louche life for which pre-war Bucharest was famed. Six months later he was dead. An earthquake on March 4, 1977 struck just east of the capital and a chunk from a tumbling apartment house struck him fatally on Bucharest’s Boulevard Magheru — one of 1,570 who died.

As the rule of Nicolae Ceausescu entered upon its fifteenth year, Romania sank deeper into despair with food shortages on the one hand and monumental construction projects on the other: A subway project that tore up much of Bucharest; "systematization" (in imitation of North Korea), consisting of demolition and reconstruction of existing villages, towns, and cities; resumption of the feckless Danube-Black Sea canal; the 54-mile Transfagarsan military highway across the Carpathian range; Ceausescu's enormous and ugly "Palace of the People." In other words, a brutal and alien transformation of nearly everything people had recognized as intrinsically Romanian. A tiny sample: in the restaurant of Bucharest's new Hotel National, I asked a waiter for a glass of tuica, formerly the ubiquitous national drink distilled from plums with an added tart touch acquired from plum pits in the bottle. "No tuica!" said the waiter, to whom I remonstrated, "But how can you call this the Hotel National and not serve the national drink?" He coolly replied: "Try whisky or vodka."

In spring 1979 I was invited again by the Titulescu foundation (named for Romania's distinguished interwar foreign minister) to give a lecture. As a fee, they offered a tour of the vast delta of the Danube on the edge of the Black Sea, beginning at the river port of Tulcea. I used the occasion to report a piece for the Sunday travel section. In Tulcea I was met by Vania Ivanoff, a savvy guide, with a slender motorboat. We zipped out to look at the towering reed beds. Soon we plunged into a cawing, peeping world of birds — pelicans, falcons, egrets, ibises and cormorants. Vania pointed out a rare mute swan that had just laid eggs. Then he steered to an inlet where almost invisible amid a thicket of willows stood a rude hut with sides made of tall reed stalks. A wizened figure appeared. Vania asked him if he had fish to sell. The Delta dweller poled his narrow, black-tarred skiff into weeds and returned with two sheatfish on a thick line. "Twenty kilos" he replied when asked the weight of the bigger catch. "Sixteen if he's a gram," Vania replied. "This man is a Terente!"

There, TERENTE! the Robin Hood of Romanian legend, song and film was uttered.

I had heard the name of the bandit from the journalist, Tita Chiper, who told me that around 1920 her father encountered him at a boat landing near his hometown of Galati, where he asked to be taken to the south shore of the Danube. In her account, the passenger stood up when they had reached midstream and announced: "I am Terente." Her father replied. "You can kill me if you want to" and continued rowing. Terente was impressed and gave him a present. After reciting this tale she recalled a popular song from the 1920s and burst into song, trilling "Terente, Terente…"

From Vania I now heard the apocryphal tale that the outlaw (for whom he used the universal Balkan word, "hajduk") had escaped the clutches of the gendarmerie numerous times by diving into

the Danube with a long reed stalk and breathing through the cane from under water. He was known as the "king of the marshes."

Where the name Terente came from I never learned. He was born Stefan Vasali, a descendant of the Slavic tribe of Lipovans, somewhere along the lower Danube in 1895 (or 1896) and was a fisherman, served as an army barge captain in World War I and finally became a daring and virile bandit noted for seizing young women he fancied. One of them, Sylvia Bernescu, published a story in 1924 of her adventures entitled "In the Clutches of Terente."

By this time, he had become a sensation of the tabloid press in England, France and Hungary. Vienna and Paris newspapers sent correspondents to the Danube port of Braila to search for him. After a murder was attributed to Terente, authorities set a reward of 200,000 lei for his capture. The gendarmerie searched a huge area around the lower Danube. For three years he hid out in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. He returned to his Danube haunts in 1927 and hid in a church vicarage near Braila until he disturbed a religious service and was denounced to the authorities. He was spotted in a boat by a gendarme who shot him. An autopsy was performed by a court physician. His penis (22 centimeters) was preserved in a jar in the Bucharest Legal-Medical Institute perhaps in recognition of the Romanian preoccupation with setting records.

In September 1983 I was again invited to lecture in Bucharest by the Titulescu Foundation, which paid the air fare and the hotel costs. Their (cash-strapped) offering for a lecture (on American foreign policy) in September 1983 was a guided tour of the sixteenth century Curtea de Arges Monastery, some ninety miles from Bucharest in the southern foothills of the Carpathian mountain range.

There at the top of an avenue of ancient linden trees was an enormous Romanian Orthodox cathedral with two strange, seemingly tilted spires. In the cathedral were the tombs of two kings of Romania: the fairly good Carol I (1839-1914) and the fairly good Ferdinand (1865-1927). Two of their spouses, including the notorious Queen Marie (1875-1938) were interred there, too. In 2004, some 21 years after my visit, a third king, the fairly bad Carol II (1893-1953) was removed from his grave in exile in Portugal and buried outside the Curtea de Arges cathedral alongside his notorious longtime mistress, Elena "Magda" Lupescu.

For lack of a better topic I asked the abbot of Curtea de Arges. "What is your biggest problem?"

"Sex." He replied.

"Sex?" I asked, eyes doubtless bugging. "Can you explain the problem with sex?"

"Yes. The sects of Pentacostalists. Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists. They are competing for our believers!"

1986-1990

In September 1986, I returned to Bucharest with an arrangement to interview Nicolae Ceausescu for *The New York Times Magazine*. He demanded that I send questions in advance (unique in my experience of top-ranking government officials).

I booked a room in the past and future four-star hotel, the familiar Athenee Palace. There was no pepper shaker on the dinner table (pepper was on the no-import list in the shortage of hard currency era) and next morning I had to ask a waiter for sugar to go with breakfast coffee. He took a packet from his jacket pocket and dolefully presented it to me. The Athenee, scene of elegant royal romps in the interwar period and then the playground of Nazi bigwigs and their friends from the Romanian Iron Guard, now was infested with cockroaches. Paint was peeling and the heating was turned off. The bedside reading lamp did not work.

The entire hotel had sunk into misery, as had almost everything around it. Bookstore windows were full of Nicolae Ceausescu books and featured the twenty-eighth volume of his speeches. There were also phonograph records of his public addresses complete with cheers from crowds (One, I recall, went something like *Slava Nostra Scump Tovarasul!* — Long Live Our Dear Comrade!)

To the southeast of the hotel on what was Palace (now Revolution) Square stood the seven-storey building housing the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, whose Secretar General was Nicolae Ceausescu. His one-act play, as absurd as any composed by Ionesco, began at 9:30 a.m. October 2, 1986 with a slender captain of the guard in a smartly tailored brown uniform escorting me into a large room and then standing at attention the whole time to the right of a row of flunkies in civilian clothes plus television and still cameramen.

Ceausescu, barely 5 feet 3 tall, entered from another door, greeted me with a soft handshake and gestured for us to sit down – he in the middle and me to his right. He then proceeded to read my heavily edited questions and his very stilted responses. He seemed acutely self conscious. The Q&A was unusable in a Western newspaper. When he was finished I inquired if I could ask some additional questions and he nodded his assent. But even those responses sounded rehearsed.

Afterward I called on General Ilie Ceausescu, eight years younger than Nicolae and an utter contrast. I found him a relaxed, modest and pleasant person. He became quite animated when talking about his favorite subject, Romanian history, the subject of his several books. I then drove ninety-

nine miles west to Scornicesti, to inspect the ancestral Ceausescu village. I was accompanied by Olga Maniu, daughter of a renowned poet, Adrian Maniu (1891-1968).

On the way Olga told me Ceausescu stories, some of them perhaps apocryphal, beginning with her thesis that he left his family and his alcoholic father, who named several of his children Nicolae, at age eleven. And walked to Bucharest. There he got a job as an apprentice and was picked up by Communists when he was fourteen. The party became his family," she said. "He resented being cast out by his real family. When his new family was being attacked he resisted. (After World War II) "He became a hitman for Gheorgiu-Dej. He killed a man in a café who wouldn't sing *The Internationale*. He asked to attend the (Soviet) Frunze (military) Academy but was rejected for his inability to learn Russian. He resented the Russians ever since. He helped put down a peasant rebellion in 1949 with his pistol. He made himself valuable. He was very aggressive. Then his career took off. But he has taken care of his family, in a peasant way." This was the sum of Olga Maniu's account.

Ceausescu had recently opened a hall commemorating great moments in Romanian history. He was also planning to turn Targoviste, a medieval market town, into a kind of alternate capital with a new palace. Might the dictator have had a shred of doubt considering the ominous past of this site? It was after all where Vlad Tepes (The Impaler) first practiced the impalement of enemies on a tepes ("spike" or "stake"). The occasion was Easter Sunday, 1456, the day of his enthronement as a prince. Vlad III of the house of Draculea — dragon, aged twenty-five, had gathered a large number of boyars — the land owning nobles who had caused the cruel deaths of his father and a brother. When his guests were full of food and drink he had the doors barred. The senior boyars were hauled out and impaled on sharpened stakes — a practice Vlad later applied to thousands of invading Turks. His bloodthirstiness together with his family name "Draculea" made him a natural forebear in name at least of Bram Stoker's vampire.

Ceausescu didn't care about vampires. He was obsessed only with power. So in 1979, he authorized the production of the historical film Vlad Tepes, which cast the prince as a national hero. (Suitably bloodthirsty — the film is noteworthy for having been acclaimed by non-Romanians for its historical accuracy.)

Ceausescu, believing that his own role in Romania matched or exceeded those of his royal predecessors, had a kinglike scepter made for his presidential inauguration in 1974. His Targoviste history hall was dominated by a five-foot high Ceausescu portrait. It faced a painting of Trajan, the Roman emperor who finally subdued the Dacian (proto-Romanian) army of Decebal in the year 106.

Most amazing of all was a large oil by a Iasi painter of Mihai Viteazu (the Brave) — the nobleman who briefly united the three Romanian principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania — dressed in sixteenth century finery and reaching out with a wineglass to toast Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, who were depicted wearing twentieth century clothes. *Scinteia* and other papers were already calling Ceausescu a "demigod." When I asked Olga Maniu what she thought about him she snorted, "comparing himself to a Roman emperor? Demi-god? No! He thinks he's a god!" (I obscured her name in my handwritten notes on a yellow legal tablet during the trip in case the pad fell into the hands of the Securitate.)

A day after Ceausescu gave the interview, *Scinteia* (The Spark), the daily newspaper of the Partidul Comunist Roma, printed the entire text. (So much for exclusivity.) I felt no regrets later when *The Times* chose not to print more of Ceausescu's questions and answers than the five they had published in my article entitled "The Cult of Ceausescu" (January 18, 1987). But he was furious and ordered his ambassador in Washington, Nicolae Gavrilescu, to West 43rd Street in New York to protest and to notify my editors that I was persona non grata in Romania — again. This ban lasted until 1989.

Unrest was rapidly spreading across the Communist countries of Eastern Europe amid the wavering of the East German regime and the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9. It struck Romania November 11 with a protest by students in Bucharest waving placards reading: "We Want Reforms Against Ceauşescu Government." Riots broke then broke out December 16 in the western city of Timisoara. Ceausescu brushed off the nascent rebellion. After ordering army units to suppress the demonstrations in Timisoara, he calmly departed December 18 on a state visit to Iran. By the time he returned the evening of December 20, the spreading unrest had reached Bucharest. He announced a speech to the nation the next day.

On December 21 — and with Elena at his side — he spoke in a hoarse voice from the balcony of the Central Committee building, and condemned the Timisoara demonstrators. Shortly jeers were heard among the 100,000 or so assembled below in the Palace Square and continued as he promised to increase wages and benefits in January.

The uncomprehending Ceausescus fled inside where they remained until the next morning. On December 22 derisive chants resumed and grew as a crowd assembled. He ordered a helicopter to carry him and wife Elena out of capital. The pilot first headed toward their lakeside castle at Snagov, 25 miles north of the capital, but turned, on panicky orders from Ceausescu, and landed near Titu twenty miles to the northwest.

There two Securitate guards had to hail a passing car for the Ceausescus who then, as if inexorably drawn to the haunts of Vlad, finished this journey and their reign in a drab military barracks in Targoviste. There on Christmas Day a military court tried them over a period of several hours on charges of "crimes against the people" and genocide, pronounced them guilty and ordered them executed by a firing squad.

With no correspondent in Bucharest *The New York Times* assigned me to write the main coverage of the last weeks of Ceausescu's rule from Washington (where I had been based since mid-1973). I was then sent to the Romanian capital in early January 1990.

There I learned a further piece of the Romanian past. Across Palace Square from the Central Committee building, where Ceausescu last spoke to the crowds so disastrously in December, stood the National Museum of Art.

At a side entrance I met a young curator, Codruta Cruceanu. She told me that Ceausescu's promise December 21 to distribute *bunuri* "goods" to his starving and repressed people had prompted a band of gypsies with a horse-drawn cart to knock on this tall door of her museum. When Codruta opened up the gypsies demanded, "Where are the goods?" She said they were at the wrong place and shut the door. But her instinct told her trouble was coming.

"Maybe thieves!" she warned other curators. Together with art students and Bucharest painters began moving thousands of paintings and other artworks into storage rooms, leaving a Rembrandt, a Jan Bruegel, some Hans Memlings and an El Greco on the walls. What they feared she said was "thieves." What came through the skylights instead were special units of the Securitate still loyal to the dictator and firing bazookas, machineguns and sniper rifles at army units who had joined the revolution.

Many of the museum windows were shot out during the next three days. Finally the Securitate units set fire to the museum and then retreated to safety through underground tunnels. Much of the museum's archives and laboratories were destroyed and some paintings damaged. But Codruta's early warning saved the bulk of its treasures,

The museum contained several sculptures of Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), the Romanian whose genius was recognized around 1900 by his teachers at Bucharest's National School of Fine Arts. I had never seen any of his remarkable works before and was anxious to see more.

The opportunity came in September when I drove 160 miles west to the Jiu valley to talk to coal miners. The soft coal miners of Petrila, who had bad experiences with journalists in the past, would talk to me only if I descended to a coal face with them. I went down to the fourth level, about 450

feet and was reminded that Jiu miners were the first to launch a major protest against the Ceausescu regime back in 1977.

Six thousand miners rode trains in June 1990 to Bucharest to rally in defense of the just elected President Ion Iliescu, who was under attack by student demonstrators in University Square. Violent clashes ensued and the miners were blamed — not the students.

After listening to and reporting their complaints, I drove back down the lovely valley near where Constnatin Brancusi was born in the village of Hobita about 12 miles west of Targu Jiu where he spent his boyhood. There in 1938 the city of about 90,000 erected an ensemble of his sculptures in commemoration of Targu Jiu's defenders against Austro-Hungarian attackers in 1916. (Brancusi had moved to Paris in 1903 and spent the first world war in the French capital.) Two decades after the armistice, the sculptures were commissioned as a war memorial by the Womens League of Gorj, whose county seat is Targu Jiu.

Despite the disrepair suffered by the outdoor sculptures during the Communist era (the mayor of Targu Jiu wanted to tear them down), they struck me as magnificent, beginning with the towering *Column of the Infinite* — 17 stacked rhomboids with a half-rhomboid at the top — thought to express the concept of infinity. Nearby was his *Table of Silence* with an ensemble of twelve chairs circling a table and his solemn Gate of the Kiss. All three have since been lovingly restored. A worthy tribute to Romania's "Mioritic Space."

I had come to Romania because it was part of the Balkans I wanted to understand better by becoming a foreign correspondent. All I had known before was from university studies with Robert Lee Wolff, a superb scholar of Balkan history. What I learned over the next three decades filled me with awe and delight in the unique examples of beauty created by Romanians in music, art, architecture, poetry, prose and philosophy. I also became acquainted with the many horrors and the few good moments of their political history. I even learned a little Romanian.

APPROACHING ALBANIA

To enter almost hermetically sealed Albania was all but unthinkable in 1963 when I began seeking a visa. Perhaps there could be some consolation in the fact that it was nothing personal.

Isolation gave substance to the broadening siege mentality of its despot, Enver Hoxha (1908–1985). He had begun with trenchant hostility toward "imperialist" Britain and America in 1945, then expanded that to "revisionist" Yugoslavia in 1948, beyond to "revisionist" Russia after 1959 and ultimately to "revisionist" China after 1976. ("Revisionist" was any teaching interpreted by Hoxha as straying from the path of Stalinist orthodoxy.) Each of these countries had involved themselves in Albania to a lesser or greater degree — most at heavy cost and no profit.

Who could blame an Albanian leader for being xenophobic, given the nation's cavalier treatment at the hands of foreign powers since the end of the nineteenth century? In the last months of their empire, the Ottoman Turks even tried to denationalize them by imposing a new "Ottoman" nationality. European powers had mocked the Albanians, then briefly imposed a comic opera monarch on them and finally invaded their country.

In the interwar years Albania had been ruled by a volatile Orthodox bishop, Fan Noli, and by a capable tribal leader, Ahmet Zogu who made himself king.

Few lands were so remote, so inscrutable: The language Indo-European, but directly related to no other. A mountainous landscape, two-thirds of it above 3,000 feet. For practically forty-five years it was a virtually unapproachable - a fortress, bristling at the close of the Communist era with some 160,000 pillboxes (others claim there were 700,000!) erected to defend a backward, impoverished ideological redoubt that no one else coveted.

My father, Carroll Binder, had preceded me by three decades as a newspaper correspondent seeking to visit Albania. Visa? No problem then. He went by car from Greece in 1930, the only difficulty being the miserable roads. "This funny little kingdom (of Ahmed Zogu), "is about five hundred years behind the rest of Europe," he wrote at the time.

In my case I had to go, hope against hope, to the Embassy of the Peoples Socialist Republic of Albania on Belgrade's broad Boulevard of Prince Miloš from time to time to request a visa. In the foyer a bust of the man Hoxha called "The Great Stalin," symbol of Albania's official antipathies, and safely dead, rose from a plinth. Diplomatic laundry flapping on a clothesline was visible through the back doors of the former bourgeois townhouse. Invariably, a low ranking consular official politely accepted my request saying it would be passed on to Tirana. Invariably there was no reply.

Perhaps one could discern a kind of response in the shortwave broadcast from Albania in accented English that started: “Good Day. This is Radio Tirana. First, the news: “The Titoist revisionist clique has attempted to deliver another blow against the true teaching of Marxism-Leninism....”

Formal letters to Tirana over the years went unanswered (though eventually my name was placed on the official Tirana mailing list for Albanian propaganda). As late as 1984, a telephone request to the Albanian mission to the United Nations for a meeting with a diplomatic representative elicited the response: ‘‘You cannot talk to anyone anytime.’’

Among my many attempts to gain entry to Albania, the most ridiculous took place at the official wake for Romania’s President Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in the ornate reception room of the Grand

National Assembly in Bucharest in March 1965. Of the foreign guests, for the most part second-tier Communist leaders, the prize was China’s Prime Minister Chou En-lai.

A Romanian protocol officer guided me — his idea — to the curiously unguarded sanctum where drinks and canapes were being served. I went up to the Chinese Premier who wore a well-tailored blue Mao jacket and asked for an interview. This dialogue ensued.

“Go away you, damned Yankee imperialist.”

“Could I just ask...”

“Actually (pause), you imperialists helped us. If it hadn’t been for you we would not have gotten so far.”

“My question is...

“I’m here for the funeral, not for questions. Then I am going to Albania.”

“Take me with you to Albania.”

“There is no room on the plane.” (That flummoxed me and I went silent.)

Sure enough, a few days later Radio Tirana’s English service broadcast something like: “Prime Minister of Peoples Republic of China Chou En-lai is delivering a speech in the northern Albanian metropolis of Shkoder. Here is Comrade Chou En-lai...” (followed by discourse in Chinese without interpretation, interrupted by loud cheers from his Albanian audience).

Perhaps colleagues from the European Communist newspapers or wire services had visited Albania and could tell something about the country? Alas, I could find only one — Denes Polgar, a witty Hungarian from the MTI press agency. He had been an official guest for ten days in the 1950s, describing the trip as wretched: “Finally, on the last day, I saw a good — looking woman on a boulevard in Tirana. I said to my guide, ‘That is the first woman I have seen that I would like to

make love to.' The guide replied, 'Unfortunately that is impossible. That is the wife (Nexhmije) of Enver Hoxha'."

It took me twenty-seven years of trying. In February 1990, Deputy Foreign Minister Sokrat Plaka said his country might consider resuming relations with Moscow and Washington. Three months later President Alia made an offer of "friendship" to both superpowers. Testing this out, I applied yet again and on May 1 1990 was issued a visa at the embassy on Prince Miloš Boulevard that I had visited so often in futility. It was stamped Republika Popullore Socialiste e Shqiperise — Albania having held on to the designation of a "Socialist Peoples Republic" years after other East European countries had happily dropped it. My passport was handed me by Ambassador Kujtim Hysenaj, a handsome and cultivated career diplomat in his early forties whom I had befriended several years earlier. (He was appointed chief of the Albania Intelligence Service a decade later.) Hysenaj explained that my visa was granted in conjunction with the upcoming visit to Tirana of the U.N. Secretary General, Perez de Quellar, a diplomatic first for Albania.

The prospect of filling in the last blank spot on my Balkan map delighted me, certainly more so than my editors in New York. Then and later, Albania merited something between a nod and a yawn from them. I booked a plane ticket to the Montenegrin capital, Titograd (soon to revert to the name Podgorica), where I rented a car to drive the fifteen miles to the frontier at Han i Hoti ("Inn of the Hoti clan") and the 90 miles on to the capital. (That border had been drawn in 1913 in the middle of Albanian tribal lands as a result of a brief war between the relatively new state of Montenegro and the brand-new state of Albania.)

A cold rain fell on the Shkoder road across the rock-strewn moonscape of a plain. Only a few farm houses were visible. There seemed to be no traffic signs. Why? There was no automobile age traffic. Private cars were banned. There were estimated to be no more than 2,000 automobiles in the entire country. Concerned I might lose my way, I stopped in what appeared to be the main square of the ancient Albanian city. A young man on a bicycle balancing an umbrella paused by my window.

"Tirana?" I asked and pointed ahead, "rruga? (road?) He gestured that I should follow him and began to pedal. On a roughly cobblestoned street just past the Shkoder soccer stadium we came to a low-set house on a street named Oso Kuka (a hero of the nineteenth century Albanian independence struggle). I was waved, somewhat perplexed, to the door by the bicyclist to his father, a middle-aged man in a cardigan who greeted me, led me inside and introduced himself. He was Asim Gruda, a mechanical engineer who had studied in Prague. His wife Makbule bustled about serving tiny cups of coffee and home baked cookies. Soon gathered were Akill, the bicyclist, his brothers Astrit,

Artan, Adnan and some of their girl friends. I excused myself briefly to go the car for some fruit and candies to give as presents. Bouncing between fragments of various languages including Serbian, French, Italian and English I explained what I was doing in Albania. Asim Gruda said, “But we know who you are. We have heard you on the radio, on Voice of America.” I was dumbfounded. Also humbled by this surprising introduction to the traditional warmth of Albanian hospitality. I worried that my visit might cause them trouble with plainclothes officers of the powerful Sigurimi. Much later I learned that agents had come to ask who was the foreigner with the car. At the time the 64-year-old Asim said he was unafraid. To underscore this he told a joke about a man who caught a fine fish in Lake Shkoder and proudly brings it back for his wife to cook. She says the stove doesn’t work because power has been cut off. How about a fire? No coal. No wood. In resignation the husband trudges to the lakeshore and throws the fish back in. The fish leaps up and shouts, “Long Live the Party of Labor!”

Heartwarming as it was to get acquainted with the Grudas that first day, I was running late and started for Tirana to get there by nightfall.

After having worked and lived in Communist countries during the previous three decades I thought I recognized the face of destitution. But I was unprepared for its breadth and depth in Albania: The narrow highway potholed every few yards. Driving faster than 35 miles per hour was too jarring to attempt. Scarcely any motor traffic. Some seventy horse carts, thirty drawn by donkeys, three taxis. Now and then a battered farm tractor or a 1950s vintage truck, once in a while a three-wheel vehicle cobbled together with braces and wire, powered with something like a lawn mower engine — but no passenger cars at all for 70 miles. The few hitchhikers I stopped for apologetically declined a ride when I said I was a foreigner. The dingy towns and villages seemed to have few, if any, shops. In rock-strewn fields, groups of women wearing trousers, aprons and white kerchiefs wielded hoes, shovels, forks and picks while others guided plows behind horses whose ribs showed sharply. But no men were visible doing farm labor. Statistics showed 46 percent of Albania’s work force were women. From that first day onward I never noticed an obese Albanian. Explainable doubtless by the fact that most walked rather than rode, as well as by their spare diet.

On distant mountain ledges were the Communist Party’s equivalents of capitalist billboards: the political slogans in the tall letters in white paint: RROFTE SHOK ENVER! (LONG LIVE ENVER! (he was already five years dead) and LONG LIVE PARTY OF LABOR! (the party had but a year to live under that name).

All Communist countries promoted this form of political advertising, calling it “agitation-propaganda”. But how effective was it? Most people were so indifferent to the party that they hardly registered its messages.

The approach to the capital eastward through the outskirts was not promising. Rows of hovels gave way to more substantial structures, apartment buildings, none higher than four stories but almost all of them drab or in disrepair. Only the broad Skanderbeg Square seemed to have some style to it — the well-proportioned Ethem Bey Mosque, the new national museum, the new Hotel Tirana (1979), an equestrian statue of Skanderbeg (1968). That was kitty corner to a gilded non-equestrian statue of Hoxha installed immediately after his death in 1985.

Tirana, by Balkan standards, was a fairly young city. Founded in 1614 by Suleiman Pasha Mulleti (a Turkified Albanian) at the foot of Mount Dajti, some twenty miles inland from the Adriatic coast, it was chosen as the capital in 1920 mainly because it was less vulnerable to foreign invasion than other cities that had been proposed. The population then was 10,000, smaller than Shkoder in the north or the eastern city of Korce. By 1990 the population had reached 220,000.

Turning south on the capital’s broadest boulevard, Heroes of the Nation, I came to the Hotel Dajti, “one of the oldest in Tirana,” meaning it was built in 1943 during the Italian occupation. Now the Dajti, named for the dramatic mountain that dominates Tirana’s skyline, was owned by the state and run under the supervision of the Sigurimi. Given the paucity of accommodations for foreigners, I was probably lucky to have one of its 120 beds.

“You are the first American journalist permitted to visit Albania in more than thirty years,” one of the welcoming officials told me. In fact, Harrison E. Salisbury, Moscow correspondent of The New York Times, had visited Tirana in August, 1957. At that time when Soviet relations with Albania were still friendly, he had managed to wangle an interview with Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu.

Shehu learned English in Tirana’s American School in the early 1930s, studied at a military school in Naples and fought in Spain from 1937 to 1939 in the Garibaldi International Brigade. After internment in France he returned to Albania and was instrumental in creating the Communist Party’s partisan units. In the interview, he told Salisbury: “In principle our doors are open to United States and other journalists when they want to come.”

Enver Hoxha was at that moment on vacation in the Soviet Union. When he returned there was no more talk for as long as Hoxha or Shehu lived of American journalists being welcome in Albania. In December 1981 after four decades side by side, Hoxha denounced Shehu as a traitor — who was secretly working for the United States — and had him, aged sixty-eight, and some of his close

relatives shot. The story Hoxha spread then and later was that Shehu committed suicide. Not until Hoxha was on his death bed in spring 1985 did the Albanian Communists publish a report in the party newspaper that Shehu had been slain.

Now the government laid on a program for the dozen of us journalists invited in connection with the de Quellar visit: bus excursions to the elaborately restored fortress of Skanderbeg at Kruje twenty miles to the north and to the lofty citadel of Berat, fifty miles to the south, where we were serenaded by the costumed national folklore ensemble. (I purchased a tape cassette from them as a souvenir only to discover later that it included hymns to Enver Hoxha.) Ten miles north of Berat was a town still named Stalin. When I got out to look, a plainclothes officer of the Sigurimi (security police) suddenly appeared and told me to move on.

The only pleasant feature of the roads was that some were lined with plane trees, making them pleasant avenues. A year later in the anarchy that followed, the trees were gone, sawn down by locals for firewood.

Accompanying us were several Albanian journalists, the seasoned Shaban Murati and the young Shkelqim Beqari, foreign affairs reporters of *Zeri i Popullit* (Voice of the People) who spoke quite good English. They were companionable but painfully restrained, shying away from discussing contemporary Albanian politics. Ferment bubbled in the days before our arrival and more was to come: Parliament had just enacted laws permitting citizens to travel abroad for the first time in more than forty years and to practice religion for the first time since 1968. The number of capital punishment offenses was reduced from 34 to 11 and a justice system of courts with judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys was created. A struggle was underway behind the scenes between reformers around President Alia and Hoxha loyalists. There were reports of a demonstration in the industrial town of Kavaje and of student protestors denouncing a Hoxha son in the capital. The Sigurimi was doubtless keeping a close eye on Shkelqim and Shaban as well as us visitors.

As in the Soviet Union, where mementos of Stalin remained in prominent places long after his death, so signs of Hoxha's forty-year rule were still abundant. His compound, a few blocks from the Dajti, was inhabited by his widow, and was still sealed off from public scrutiny. Across the boulevard was a large museum commemorating his life and work, a modernistic structure of white marble, glass and red steel in the shape of an eagle in flight. It was opened three years after his death. Facing north across the boulevard next to the Dajti was a statue of Lenin. Directly opposite was a statue of Stalin. Indeed, the eastward extension of the boulevard beyond Skanderbeg Square

was still named Stalin. A year later, neither Stalin nor Lenin remained and the Hoxha museum was being transformed into a public meeting hall.

That night in Tirana, amidst these trappings of triumphant socialism, the sounds of farm animals came through the open window of the Dajti — donkeys braying, horses neighing, roosters crowing and sheep bleating.

Shkelqim and Shaban introduced me to friends and so the circle widened. The Albanians I was meeting constituted perhaps my mirror image. They devoted many hours to reading, listening to radio — if they were lucky, watching television — about the world outside their prison-country. I had spent many hours scratching together what I could learn about Albanians inside that penitentiary. We both burned with curiosity, we both moved gingerly on stepping stones of knowledge through our swamps of ignorance.

One new acquaintance was Remzi Lani, the reed-thin editor of *Zeri i Renise* (Voice of Youth) who was not afraid to talk about the changes under way, although only in generalities: "In democracy someone wins and someone loses. Those who will lose here are the bureaucratized administrators, the routiniers, the mediocrities, all those who are not interested. Time will leave behind the obsolete." At that point Remzi, aged 32, supported Ramiz Alia.

Another was Gramoz Pashko, a wavy-haired professor of economics at Tirana University. To my surprise he invited me to his house. Being invited into private homes was a rarity in Communist societies and I was surprised also that he resided in his own house (later I learned it belonged to his parents who had been partisan luminaries). Gramoz astonished me again by pouring a welcoming glass of Scotch, which he had purchased on a recent and rare trip abroad. He then introduced me to his wife, Mimoza, a raven-haired beauty who taught school. It seemed Gramoz liked to surprise, even to shock visitors. He told me that faculty members were sent to the countryside to work in the fields for a month each year. ''It is sort of a vacation,'' he said. ''We do only half the planned target of a specialized worker and we also have closer, sometimes more intimate relations with the students, so that our wives ask, 'What were you doing this last month?' '' Under Ramiz Alia, similar changes in public conduct were occurring. Hand-holding, short skirts on women, shorts on men even blue jeans could be seen during the evening strolls of young people. These were sharply discouraged even at the end of the Hoxha era, as were beards and mustaches. On this first visit I saw none. Gramoz compared the new mood to a charge of electricity ''running from the top to the base.''

Remzi Lani knew Ismail Kadare. He had just published a provocative interview with the remarkable author who had by then published of ten novels and three volumes of poetry. Gramoz

knew him, too. On the telephone, Kadare agreed to an interview at his apartment a block east of Skanderbeg Square. The building was modest. A bicycle was parked next to trash cans in the dimly lit foyer. Ismail and his wife, Elena, welcomed me warmly to their comfortable third-floor flat where he had a word processor and other electronic equipment, a television set and an exercycle. With the traditional hospitality of the country they offered me coffee, brandy and one of his novels, which he inscribed. But he wanted to talk politics, not literature. Speaking French in a soft voice, he said he supported the Alia campaign "against the forces of evil." These were "not just the security police or bureaucrats, but also people in education, in agriculture and in literature." He added: "There are writers who are forces of evil." Kadare also provided an insight into the Hoxha era: "Enverism was never a cult. A cult is in the head not on walls."

With a broad forehead, heavy brows and thick glasses, he retained a somber mien even as he said "there is great joy" about the changes under way in his country. He pointed out that after he made remarks attacking the security police in Remzi Lani's interview there was no response. ''That means that they are in retreat. Actually, I would have liked a response. It would be better if the forces of evil come out in the open.''

In the spring of 1990, as Communist parties had painfully demonstrated elsewhere, the ruling party here was utterly incapable of engendering reforms that would allow it to survive even after four decades in power. (Considering that they claimed descent from Marx and Engels, the fathers of radical social change, this was a striking irony.) Meanwhile Tirana's pillbox isolation so completely cut off connections with diaspora Albanians that they played practically no role in their ancestral land as it began to open up.

This was a sharp contrast to the highly visible activities of the Polish, Hungarian, Croatian diasporas and those of the Baltic nations in the wake of the Cold War.

At the time of de Quellar's visit, Ramiz Alia was meeting with a group of intellectuals, including Kadare, to explore whether and how to dismantle the all-encompassing Communist state structures. The intellectuals urged him to get rid of the party's monopoly. But he was caught between their growing demands and pressure from the trapped and frightened old guard to resist change. We visitors had scarcely a hint of that dilemma except to note that he had tried to co-opt some of the Hoxha-era grandees like Manush Myftiu, while circumventing others. I asked for an interview with President Alia, but was turned down, flat.

Instead we were summoned on a Saturday morning to the Presidium of the People's Assembly, a modest three-story structure on the tree-lined main boulevard that was Tirana's equivalent of

Pennsylvania Avenue. With a fluid gait, Ramiz Alia entered the small reception room. Fairly tall, he was said to be an avid tennis player. He made a short speech declaring, ‘‘All the processes of development of Albania are unstoppable.’’ Then he bantered urbanely with us, saying that he had read some of our articles and heard us in radio broadcasts. He offered neither approval nor disapproval.

Among developments that could not be stopped by Alia or anyone else was unrest. That evening on the main boulevard the “korzo” promenade, common to all Balkan countries, began with hundreds of strollers. There were also knots of students from Enver Hoxha University excitedly arguing about how and when to leave the country. For many Ramiz Alia’s promised reforms were too modest and too late. ‘‘Don’t believe what he says,’’ said one student. ‘‘It’s all demagogy, lies.’’ Another young man handed me an appeal hand-written in French with phrases like ‘‘The tranquility of Albania is superficial,’’ ‘‘We are a terrorized people,’’ ‘‘Albania is near civil war,’’ ‘‘Help us!’’

Not that these sentiments were universal. Artan Duri, a 21-year-old student of literature, even parroted the old party line handed down before Alia set out on his new course: ‘‘Marx, Lenin and Stalin are one. We love Albania. We love Socialism. We love our party. We love our government.’’ He flatly rejected the idea that Albania appeared to be on the brink of great changes.

Shkelqim Beqari, sitting in on the gathering, murmured, ‘‘The word ‘change’ makes many Albanians nervous. It makes them think of what happened in the other East European countries.’’ Andi Dervishi, an art student, said: ‘‘It is a big change.’’ Then he added, ‘‘As a student of art, I want to see the masterpieces of the world. I want to go see the Louvre.’’ For Majlinda Muqrca, a student of electrical engineering, the most significant change involved ‘‘freedom to express thoughts, and the rights of the press.’’ These were among the sentiments I heard on the last night of my first visit to Tirana.

To many, the announcement two weeks earlier that people were now free to leave Albania seemed to be an invitation to try their luck asking for asylum on Skanderbeg Street — Embassy Row. The first few were repelled by security police who even entered the French and Greek embassies to seize asylum seekers. Police beat the French ambassador and his wife when they intervened. Thousands more stormed the chanceries in early July. Meanwhile, hundreds of young Albanians simply walked to the nearest frontier and attempted to cross north and east into Yugoslavia or south into Greece. There were reports of carts carrying bodies of young men killed by border guards. Others were dragged handcuffed down border village streets. While these incidents were not mentioned in the Albanian press, they were publicized in foreign news broadcasts, which sufficed to stir still more to

flee. A Tirana intellectual lamented, “Never since the fifteenth and eighteenth century have Albanians abandoned their land in such great numbers.’’

Among those who decamped was Ismail Kadare, the best-known and most popular Albanian of the day. On October 25, he announced from Paris that he had sought political asylum in France. I had gone to Tirana for a conference of Balkan foreign ministers endorsing “pluralistic democracy” and seeking to demonstrate Albania’s new openness.

But the enormous shock of Kadare’s defection obliterated news of the conference. “Comparable to Mark Twain’s asking for political asylum in England,” an Albanian intellectual said. In a letter explaining his action, Kadare wrote to Ramiz Alia: “I had expressed very clearly the necessity for a rapid, profound and complete democratization of the country. Because there is no possibility of legal opposition in Albania I have chosen this course which I of course which I never wished to take.”

Kadare was alluding to meetings the previous spring between President Alia and intellectuals on the future direction of Albanian politics. That group included Sali Berisha (1944–) a prominent cardiologist who had treated several top-ranking Communist leaders including Enver Hoxha. Just before Kadare quietly left the country, Berisha published a critique of the privileges accumulated by the Communist rulers.

The official reaction to the defection was remarkably mild, just a few sour remarks by second-level Communists. The government’s news agency said the act was “condemnable” and that he had “allied himself with the enemies of Albania.” Two of his writer colleagues, Dritero Agolli and Nezhat Tozaj, declared their continuing admiration for him. The effect was to declare Alia’s efforts at superficial reform a failure. Other forces would decide the country’s destiny.

Driving the next day through the gritty industrial town of Kavaje, population 20,000, scores of citizens greeted me with a V-sign. When I stopped hundreds gathered. A truck driver explained the V-sign was their way of expressing contempt for the Communists. Kavaje, eighteen miles southwest of the capital, was already notorious for violent anti-party demonstrations.

After a few minutes in downtown Kavaje four cars carrying uniformed and plainclothes policemen surrounded me and escorted me northward for interrogation. All at once an official from another government department appeared and told them to let me go with a warning not to stray from a prescribed route to Tirana. Kavaje had been placed “under heightened surveillance” by the Sigurimi several weeks earlier, a friendly citizen explained.

But it was too little and too late for police measures, even for the draconian measures of the border police who killed dozens of young people trying to cross frontiers,

Driving out of the country, I stopped again with the Grudas in Shkoder and one of Asim's sons remarked, "We are confused and frustrated, but we are less fearful. All of us young people want to get out." (The average age of Albanians at that point was twenty-six — one of the youngest populations in the world.)

In many conversations Romania cropped up as a metaphor for a violent end to Communist rule — something of an irony — only eleven months earlier Radio Tirana described the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu as the richly deserved fate of a "revisionist." Albania was teetering toward anarchy.

On December 5, Ismail Kadare spoke of his sense of urgency in defecting to France. Responding to questions I had transmitted, he said, "The pace of change is a matter of life and death." He said he had departed "out of the conviction that more than any action I could take in Albania, my defection would help the democratization of my country ... a delay in this direction will be fatal."

Three days later, a demonstration at Tirana university dormitories against power outages in dormitories of the university still named for Enver Hoxha suddenly became a political protest. Students shouted "Down with dictatorship!" and "Liberty or death!" A firebrand leader emerged. Azem Hajdari, a twenty-seven-year-old philosophy student, soon mobilized some 7,000 and kept them going as clashes spread to Shkoder, Kavaje and the industrial city of Elbasan. On the third day of rioting, Ramiz Alia capitulated to demonstrators' demands and endorsed formation of new political parties. He also dismissed three Politburo members, presumably opponents of reforms. On the fourth day, Sali Berisha, Gramoz Pashko, Azem Hajdari and others called the Democratic Party into being at a huge rally. Amazingly, I could telephone Tirana from Washington to interview my new acquaintances about the unfolding turmoil.

On December 20 the Alia government ordered the removal from the main boulevard of the statue of Stalin in his field marshal's uniform. It was done during the night. Next day Dr. Sali Berisha, called me in Washington to voice an appeal that the United States normalize diplomatic relations with

Albania as a means to "strengthen democratic forces." I told him it wasn't my line of work. (In fact, emissaries of Tirana and Washington had already begun that procedure although it took three more months to formalize relations.)

Of the more than 100,000 Americans of Albanian origin, most were utterly baffled by the developments in their ancestral homeland, I learned. They had devoted so much of their ethnic energies to the completely different situation of Albanians in Kosovo and the cause of independence

for that Yugoslav province, that they had neither time nor money for Albania itself. “We’d like to help although we don’t know how to do it,” Sergio Bitici (born Sejdi Byty), a friendly Manhattan restaurant owner who was co-founder of a Kosovo aid organization, told me.

Certainly the pell-mell pace of events was confusing. The first opposition newspaper started publication in January. A few weeks later Tirana’s Lenin statue that had faced the Stalin statue was removed just as quietly as its counterpart. On February 20, a mob of young people tore down the gilded forty-foot Enver Hoxha statue on Skanderbeg Square and dismantled a huge sign praising the ruling party. Piles of Hoxha books were burned. President Alia declared on television that he would meet protestors’ demands and replace the twenty-three-member government of Prime Minister Adil Carcani. An interim government was named, headed by Fatos Nano (1952–), an economist. For the third time in seven months, hordes stormed aboard barely seaworthy craft in a half dozen Adriatic ports to set out for Italy. Martial law was introduced, suspended, reintroduced. Multiparty elections were scheduled for the end of March. Every time the new opposition made a demand, Alia conceded. He also ordered security forces to refrain from firing on demonstrators, mercifully limiting fatalities to a handful.

The government tried to reduce tensions by releasing 127 political prisoners, soon to be followed by twice that number. Suddenly there were widespread shortages of milk. At 2:30 a.m., flocks of women were gathered waiting for dairy stores to open six hours later. Such was the scene when I arrived in Tirana on my third visit a few days before the vote.

Among the released political prisoners were the two gaunt sons of Mehmet Shehu. Their father had been murdered nearly ten years earlier on orders of Hoxha. Bashkim, thirty-six, and Skender, forty-one, told me they were “jobless and homeless” like most other former prisoners, and were staying with friends. Their elder brother, Vladimir, committed suicide in prison and their mother also died behind bars. All were victims of the cruelty toward extended families that animated Hoxha’s imitation of his mentor, Stalin. Shehu’s sons still did not know the details of their father’s fate. “The general opinion is that he has been killed,” said Bashkim Shehu. “Enver Hoxha’s phantom is still around.” (The Hoxha ghost continued to haunt Albanians, and so did the ghost of Mehmet Shehu’s ghost. Ismail Kadare wrote a novel, “The Successor,” about the two, which was published in 2005.)

One evening less than a week before the national elections, an aide to President Alia asked if I wanted to interview him. I declined, saying, “It doesn’t work that way — in my concept, the reporter asks for the interview.” Several German colleagues did accept Alia’s offer and found themselves featured on the front page of *Zeri i Popullit*, in effect endorsing the president.

Instead, I hitched a ride with Sali Berisha and Genc Pollo, his young multilingual press spokesman to get a taste of their first campaign. Bucketing over the cratered roads, I asked the candidate where he had learned his still elementary English. “Up in Tropoje,” (far in the north) he replied. “I took an English grammar, herding sheep. I got so deep in it that the sheep were all over the mountain.” Sharp-nosed, sharp-chinned, with a shock of dark brown hair, Berisha was quite handsome. From my meager studies I knew that the Berishas formed one of Albania’s oldest clans. The image of him chasing sheep while memorizing English was appealing. Then I heard him bellowing on the hustings like a demagogue and reserved opinion. His voice hoarse from forty previous rally speeches, he roared imprecations against the Party of Labor of which he had so recently been a member. A crowd of 7,000 was gathered in the main square of the drab chrome mining town of Peshkopi where the rally had begun with a somber recital of verses of the long-banned Gjergj Fishta. But as Berisha sought to evoke cheers with his slogans, roughly a third of the crowd stood silent, hands folded. “They are afraid,” a teacher ventured, adding that local Communists had threatened any who voted for the opposition.

The whole country lay beneath clouds of uncertainty and buzzed with rumors that resulted from a breakdown of trust in state radio, newspapers and politicians. A continuing exodus by sea and land had taken 80,000 citizens to Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia since the summer. Unrest divided families with the old largely holding on to the Communist Party and the young flocking to the new opposition, or fleeing abroad. Kestrina Budina, a 21-year-old student, remarked, “In my family, it’s three to one for the Democratic Party. Only my father is for the Communists.”

In the short pause before the elections there was time to explore other aspects of Albanian society.

I took the opportunity to ask Kestrina, Briseida Mema and Mimoza Pashko about the status of women in Albania. Kestrina responded with a verse written 90 years earlier by Andon Cujupi called Countryside:

> All Albanian men stand in the shade
> of trees and talk all day long
> While women work in the field
> Cursed be the men who live by the labor of women….

“Emancipation by the Communists has destroyed women more than it has elevated them,” said Mimoza Pashko. “They wanted a slogan woman rather than the complexity of women with all their individuality” said Briseida Mema, who was working at the time for a cultural magazine.

Just off Skanderbeg Square, on Congress of Permet Street, I found Ali Oseku, who had been a celebrated artist two decades before and the winner of the "Up With Revolutionary Spirit" Prize. Overnight he had been found to be a fan of Picasso and Jackson Pollock and condemned as a modernist. Interior Minstry police ordered him to burn some 200 paintings and he was imprisoned. After four years of forced labor, he was allowed to paint, but only if he did so "properly." So he painted "heroes of Socialist labor," and Enver Hoxha, twice, four meters high. I met him in his tiny studio, next to a coal cellar. On the walls were some portraits of family members, each weeping; some abstract landscapes and some sumptuous nudes. He had also drawn a campaign poster for the Democratic Party. It had a V for victory with green fields inside the vee and sere brown fields outside.

In the midst of the chaos before the national election, four officials of the U.S. State Department and four members of Congress turned up in Tirana. The diplomats took formal possession of the American Embassy on Labinoti Street. It had been occupied by the Italians since 1939. Spitefully they gutted it at the last moment. The legislators simply made noises about themselves. But in the chaos of the moment they and the diplomats went practically ignored.

Election day, which Albanians said brought the first free, contested voting since 1923, had some unusual twists. President Alia lost in his electoral district to a virtually unknown geologist, while his anointed prime minister, Fatos Nano, had a close call in his district. Sali Berisha swept his in the fiercely anti-Communist city of Kavaje with more than four-fifths of the vote. Over 95 percent of the 2 million registered voters participated, roughly the same as the percentage in Communist elections when non-voting was a punishable offense.

I spent a few hours at the makeshift headquarters of the scarcely three-month-old Democratic Party. A single fluorescent bulb hung above two computers being used to register precinct votes and calculate projections.

The floor was unswept, the desks and chairs scarred. Robert Manchin from the Gallup organization said he was astonished that Albanian activists had caught on to computers immediately.

The Democratic Party won almost all of Albania's cities, some by huge margins but the Communists swept the countryside and gained a two-thirds majority in the parliament. Dr. Berisha said a day later of the rural vote, "They had made their besa (oath under the kanun) to the Communists, and they kept it."

I headed north to see what was going on. Several miles south of Shkoder the two-lane highway was blocked — a hastily constructed barricade manned by armed men in uniform. I showed my

passport and press credential and was waved through. A few hundred yards further, a second barricade, this time manned by civilians red-faced with rage, most of them young. About 3:00 p.m. I reached Shkoder's main square where two Russian-made armored personnel carriers still smoldered, sending up plumes of acrid oily smoke. They had been set afire by young men with gasoline bombs after army and police units shot at demonstrators outside the five-story Party of Labor headquarters on Bulevari Stalin seven hours earlier. A friend of the Grudas who had witnessed the shootings told me three people were killed and 30 more wounded. Hundreds of young people were still gathered in front of the party headquarters, smashing its windows and shouting slogans like "Down with President Ramiz Alia!" and "Down with the Communists!"

When possible I went back to Albania in later years to observe its halting progress away from a one-party police state and toward a semblance of law and order. Always I was greeted with the generous hospitality of Albanians and always I had the sense that the nation was never far from anarchy.

Seventeen years after my initial trips the situation of the Albanians I had first met reflected the situation of the whole nation. A quarter of them had emigrated. Some were prospering either in Albania or abroad. Some had died.

Ali Oseku was again a successful artist. Sali Berisha succeeded Ramiz Alia as president, ruled five years and then nearly destroyed the country in 1997 by authorizing disastrous financial pyramid schemes. He returned to office in 2005 as prime minister, having barely won election. Shaban Murati, the *Zeri i Popullit* journalist whose last words to me had been, "I have wasted my life," went on to become Albania's ambassador to Macedonia, and then to Sweden. His colleague, Shkelqim Beqari, emigrated to the United States and became a news editor for WBUR in Boston. Briseida Mema, the cultural news reporter, rose to be chief of the Agence France Presse bureau in Tirana. Kestrina Budina earned a masters degree in international relations at Columbia University and became a banker. Remzi Lani became director of the Albanian Media Institute. Ismail Kadare was awarded the 2005 Man-Booker prize for foreign authors. Asim Gruda died in Shkoder; three of his sons emigrated. Gramoz Pashko returned to teaching economics and died in a helicopter crash in July 2006.

MAGYAR

Then came Hungary, a land largely flat as a *palacsinta* (pancake-palačinka-crepe) except for a few puddles and streams. After having grown up on a prairie, the landscape seemed familiar.

Otherwise the country remained a conundrum: with people calling themselves Magyar but forever known elsewhere as "Hungarians" — a double misnomer because it conflated them with the Huns: *Another* Asiatic people who arrived in Europe in the fifth century and devastated large swatches of central Europe before being absorbed. Then "Huns" becoming a nasty soubriquet for the Germans pitted against France and Britain in World War I. (This usage for "Huns" was, idiotically, coined in 1900 by Kaiser Wilhelm as the model for Germans to fight without mercy against the Chinese in the Boxer rebellion!)

Rather, the original Hungarians-Magyars originated east of the Urals, who arrived in southeastern Europe in the ninth century on horseback, spoke a musical but impenetrable language, and swiftly adapted western European ways and adopted the Roman Catholic faith, and who produced great poets, musicians and soldiers, but also some cruel tyrants.

But does Hungary have place in memories of my times in the Balkans?

In fact Hungarians made their mark on a good deal of Balkan territory, for example in Transylvania — today's central Romania — along the valley of the Mures (Maros), where in the tenth century they mined and transported salt.

How could one consider Southeastern European history without noting the long presence of Hungarians in Transylvania? Without considering the role of Janos Hunyadi, the fifteenth century commander, born of Vlach parents ennobled by the Hungarian royal family in his native Transylvania? Hunyadi first fought the Ottoman Turks at age thirty in 1437 at Smederevo in the Danube valley, then near Sibiu in his native Transylvania, next as far south as Varna (present-day Bulgaria) on the Black Sea in 1444, and as far west as in Kosovo in 1448 and after defeating Sultan Mehmet in 1456 at Belgrade, where he perished shortly afterward in a plague epidemic in 1456.

For that matter, Janos Kadar (1912–1989), the unpretentious Communist who governed the country from autumn 1956 until his death, was born in the Dalmatian coastal town of Fiume — now Croatia's port called Rijeka.

As I came to learn, Hungarians not only defined parts of the Balkans, they also dominated sizable portions of the peninsula until 1918. Sometimes brutally. For that Hungary paid a heavy price in lost territories, after having been on the side of the defeated in two world wars. Today several million

ethnic Magyars live on the fringes of Hungary in Serbia's Vojvodina province, in Romania's Transylvania, the Ukraine and Slovakia, with scatterings in Croatia and Slovenia.

A Hungarian tale of how the past can haunt you sticks in my memory. It was told me by Zach Havas, advertising director of the *New York Herald Tribune* and a son of the Austro-Hungarian empire who was a sergeant in the U.S. Army on V.E. Day. Because he spoke Hungarian, he was posted as a guard of Admiral Miklos Horthy, Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary and sometime ally of Hitler, along with some other high-ranking Third Reich figures. At the time Horthy was seventy-six. They were lodged in a pleasant Belgian castle at Lesbioles. One day another prisoner, the Nazi diplomat Franz von Papen, looked up from the copy of *Stars and Stripes* and said, "Horthy, the Yugoslavs want to try you as a war criminal!"

"What!" Horthy snorted. "I never did anything criminal."

"Ah," said von Papen. "The Yugoslavs say your troops killed thousands of Serbian and Jewish civilians in Novi Sad in January 1942."

"Oh. Oh" Horthy murmured, in Sergeant Havas's recollection. "I didn't know. I didn't know." (In fact, the American authorities did not want to deliver Horthy to the new Communist state of Josip Broz Tito. He was released and died a peaceful death in Portuguese exile twelve years later.)

My first brush with Hungarians occurred decades before 1963 when I first crossed the frontier of the Peoples Republic of Hungary. There was M.W. Fodor, the distinguished interwar foreign correspondent. He had been hired by the *Chicago Daily News* (of which my father, Carroll Binder, was the foreign editor) to report on Eastern and Central Europe in the 1930s.

When Hitler's Third Reich seized Austria in 1938, Fodor fled to the United States. Mike Fodor brought his wife to our home near Lake Michigan as we walked on the beach. Mrs. Fodor, from landlocked Hungary, gazed out and asked, "What ocean is this?" Fodor's prescient 1937 book, *Plot and Counterplot in Europe* was the first I read about the region.

The next Hungarian was Michael Zilahy, a brilliant classmate at George School in Newtown, Pennsylvania. We chose him as our class valedictorian in 1949 and he rewarded us with a philosophical commencement address on "Light." Michael was the son of Lajos Zilahy, the novelist-playwright, who had fled the Communist regime established in Hungary under the Red Army in 1945. Michael was my roommate in our freshman year at Harvard, He killed himself over a girl who left him for another. He left behind a note that said, "Life without love is not worth living."

In summer 1963, I drove to Budapest, to meet Paul Underwood, my NYT predecessor on the Balkan beat who had been reassigned to the northern part of Eastern Europe. He did not miss Belgrade, but he loved Budapest and wanted an excuse to visit there one more time to introduce me to its charms. One of those charms was the old Duna Hotel on the left bank of the Danube (*Duna* in Hungarian). The other was his favorite hangout, the nearby Pipacs piano bar (whose name translated as "poppy").

The Duna was a *fin-de-siècle* hostelry with a gracious dining room that featured a trio playing romantic tunes, many composed by the eminent Jewish-Hungarian musician Emmerich Kalman. The featured item on the menu was *fogas*, a perch-pike scored on its sides, breaded, bent upward to form a kind of half moon and served with a tartar sauce and a Badacsony white wine — the fish and the wine from nearby Balaton, the country's largest lake. The food, drink, music and service were incomparable. Gyorgy Lukacs, the eminent Marxist philosopher whom I had gone to interview a few blocks away on Belgrade Quay, told me on his eightieth birthday — April 13, 1965 — that he had spent the previous evening at the Duna celebrating with old friends.

The Pipacs so favored by Underwood was a smoky dive with a long bar, its stools occupied by a dozen shapely women, some of whom seemed to recognize Paul. I did not linger.

The old Duna was replaced by an enormous Marriott hotel bearing the old name but retaining nothing of its ambience. Today the Internet lists a number of "Pipacs" bars in and around Budapest including a Pipacs that could be close to the original. But I never went back to find out.

My initial forays in Hungary were not very productive, despite the efforts of the press office of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry on Bem Square, which was headed by Kitty Havas, a keenly intelligent American of Hungarian origin.

One of her suggestions took me to the Red Banner Farm at Nadudvar on the great Hungarian Plain where the host introduced himself as "Szabo Istvan" (last name first as was the custom of the land, the equivalent to Steven Taylor in English, in other words, a common name). He was, he said, a member of the Central Committee of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers Party — one of its several designations through the years, as was the case with practically all Communist parties.

The morning was taken up by mounds of statistics unloaded on me by Szabo and the Red Banner bookkeeper and chairman — yearly production, pay rates and the effects of a new sharecropping system recently introduced by Szabo with great fanfare as a desirable innovation for the nation's farmers chained to the draconian regulations of the Communist farming system.

The trio pressed statistics on me while serving coffee and *barack* (apricot brandy) in amounts that made me nearly reel. Then they insisted that I accompany them on a pheasant hunt.

We proceeded to a field near a small forest. But the brandy caused me to wave the gun around as I tried to take aim at the fowl stirred to flight by beaters and I told my hosts that I could not join the shoot. Rather, I needed to talk to some farmers. Greatly disappointed, they escorted me to a farmyard. There, a lone man was kneeling as he grasped the large sugar beets, lopped off the roots and leaves and tossed the conical vegetables onto a pile in deft rhythmic motions — grasp-lop-lop-toss. The Red Banner bosses and I stood watching. Then Szabo told me to ask a question.

"What is the difference in your life between ten years ago and today?" I asked.

Szabo translated, beginning, "*Elvtars Paraszt* (Comrade Peasant) …"

The farm worker looked up and replied, "Two pigs."

"What do you mean, two pigs?" Szabo demanded.

"Ten years ago, I didn't have two pigs."

Exasperated, Szabo posed his own question: "What is the difference between Rakosi and Kadar" — that is, compare Matyas Rakosi, the party leader installed by the Russians in 1948 who modeled himself on Josef Stalin, to Janos Kadar, the mild-mannered man who was made party leader during the Hungarian Uprising in 1956.

"Who is Rakosi?" Comrade Peasant replied, ending this vaudevillian exchange.

It was testimony to something I encountered again and again throughout the Balkans: the toiling masses, subjected to appalling privations and occasionally to strict indoctrination, were fundamentally indifferent to the big shots who were running — or ruining — their lives.

Some time later I took a close look at another collective farm, the Lenin Agricultural Production Cooperative spread over 10,677 acres near Tiszafoeldvar, about 50 miles southwest of Nadudvar. I was accompanied by Ilona Gazdag, who worked at the time for *United Press* and served as an invaluable translator and colleague.

This farm seemed to be in much better shape than the Red Banner. But in both cases, the collective mixed many impoverished *parszt* with a few *gazda*s (prosperous farmers). Istvan Kavasi, who had made a good living off of the 250 acres he had inherited, told us how he was derided as a *kulak* and then had most of his land confiscated.

The big forty-three-year-old choked up over the memory. Later he said that he earned a comfortable salary as the "production director" on what had been his own land (and much more) and could take a nice vacation.

Among the delights of Hungary was the musicality of the Magyar language, impenetrable though it was. I liked what has been called its "waltz-like cadence" which I first heard in a 1953 song of Liane Augustin (1928–1978), who made many recordings of her performances at Vienna's Boheme Bar. The trio included a gifted Hungarian guitarist-singer, Laszlo Gati. He sang the chorus of Liane's lament, *Warum? Warum, hast Du mir Weh getan?* ("Why, Why have you caused me pain?") in Hungarian. In the far away American Middle West, I found the song enchanting.

A Czech linguist, Agoston Frankl once called the rhythms and harmony of Magyar "mesmerizing." I like hearing the five-syllable *Viszuntlatasra* for "I'll be seeing you" (that is, "goodbye") and the six-syllable *Jo napot kivanok* for "I wish you a good day" (the Hungarian equivalent of "Hello"). Both with emphasis on the first syllable.

Although Gypsies were present in all southeastern European countries there was no place where they seemed to be more welcome than in Hungary, at least as musicians. This was doubtless due in part to such composers as Emmerich Kalman (1882–1953) whose operettas celebrated Gypsy themes. *The Gypsy Virtuoso* and *The Csardas Princess* electrified audiences from New York to Berlin. In any case, "Gypsy" music and musicians were omnipresent in Budapest cafés and restaurants. (This was long before the term *Roma*, favored by Gypsies themselves, became common usage.)

A verse from a song performed by a corpulent Gypsy singer one night in (I think) the Pilvax Café made famous in the nineteenth century by Sandor Petofi, the heroic poet-revolutionary has stayed with me ever since. (Translation supplied by round-faced Andy Timar, then the *Associated Press* correspondent.)

What is that sound from the tent?
It is the cry of a baby
Who is the father?
Too late! He's gone now

Yet there was also a solemn, somber aspect to Hungary, only a few years after the cataclysm of the 1956 uprising against the Communist system. It was discernable in eyes and voices darkened by a sudden reminder of a terrible time. (Some 2,500 Hungarians and 700 Soviet soldiers were killed in the sporadic clashes over seventeen days).

On the tenth anniversary of what is now termed the Hungarian Revolution I asked Ilona Gazdag to suggest a person who could frame the characteristics of the nation that exposed this event. She

suggested a writer who agreed to meet me at a popular café on Vaci Street. He answered my question on condition that I not mention or even write down his name: “There is in the nature of Magyars,” he said, “something called *szalmalang* a straw flame, that flares up suddenly and burns very brightly until it consumes itself.” I was able to quote him on this appropriate image, even in anonymity.

But this period in Hungary was so tranquil that I had to scratch around for stories. I wrote about the Danube, about poets. Even about a poetry festival.... At the gathering of European poets in 1966, one of Hungary’s distinguished writers, Gyula Illyes (1902–1983), warned his audience against the divisive role played by bathtubs because ever since their introduction in modern life, “one part of humanity bathed and the other did not.” Automobiles were the “other monster, the contemporary separator” he told the other poets, most of whom appeared to be well-washed and had arrived in motor vehicles.

I was tempted to write about Jozef Cardinal Mindszenty (1892–1975), who had been living as a fugitive from Hungarian justice since 1956 in the United States Embassy (located on the west side of *Szabadsag* (Freedom) Square). The prelate had already earned a reputation for stubbornness — imprisoned for a year at the end of World War II for opposing the ruling Arrow Cross Party allied with the Nazis, arrested again in 1948 by the Communists and sentenced to life for treason; then spending fifteen years in the U.S. Embassy and ending up opposing the Vatican’s wishes to make peace with Budapest until 1971, when he accepted exile in Vienna.

From time to time I had ridden with Mindszenty in the embassy paternoster as he descended from his third-floor quarters. He gave off a powerful odor of garlic which, as a true Hungarian, he consumed in huge quantities for his health.

I desisted from writing about him when embassy officers pleaded with me not to complicate their relations with the Hungarian government.

I returned to Budapest in January 1977 on the invitation of Janos Hajdu, the host of the popular weekly television program called *Panorama* at the state television station. (We had known each other in Bonn, where he had been the correspondent of the Communist Party daily, *Nepszabadsag*). Janos had also invited a Japanese, Ago Keiichi, and a Russian, Valentin Zorin to discuss the world just as Jimmy Carter was assuming the US presidency. We convened at the main TV studios, installed in the stately building of the former Hungarian stock exchange on Szabadsag Ter (Freedom Square) across from the U.S. Embassy.

First came introductions. I noticed that Zorin, then fifty-three and a famous Soviet television personality, was wearing the ribbon of some decoration in his lapel — Hero of Soviet Journalism, perhaps. I asked him softly if he was going to wear it during the broadcast. “Naturally,” he said and then with a sneer, “Why?”

“If you are going to wear your ribbon, I am going to wear mine,” I replied,

“What is yours?” Zorin asked.

“It is a Mickey Mouse pin... you see, I was just elected president of the Mickey Mouse Clubs of America, and they gave me this special pin.” With my right hand I reached into my breast pocket. Zorin seized my elbow and without calling my bluff muttered, “All right, no decorations.”

During the warm-up, Janos, then forty-three, asked me how long I had been coming to Budapest. “Since 1963” I replied, “but my mother recently told me that I was conceived in Budapest.” Poker-faced, Janos did not appear to take notice.

The program began with a dozen translator-interpreters sitting behind scrims doing Japanese to Russian, Japanese to English, Japanese to Hungarian, Russian to English, Russian to Hungarian, English to Hungarian and back. Janos introduced the Russian and the Japanese and then turned to me: “David here tells me he was conceived in Budapest … how did that come about?”

Blood rushed to my face. I felt my cheeks tingling. “Uh, er, um,” I stammered, instinctively treating his query as part of an ordinary conversational exchange. “It must have been in... Let’s see. June, 1930… Maybe a warm day….” Then I lost it.

Hajdu later told me the exchange was turned into a popular video clip repeated frequently on Hungarian television to entertain the masses.

CRNA GORA

A cartoon published in *Borba*[4] on July 19, 1964, was my introduction to Montenegro. The legend above it read: "Titograd — Hotel Crna Gora[5] — Coffee 120 Dinars." The drawing, signed D. Savić, was of four adult males with handlebar mustaches — three with suits and neckties — and the fourth gesturing to a waiter, also mustachioed, who stands with a towel over his left shoulder and a pencil perched on his ear. The caption below has the legend: " — Waiter, one coffee and four cups!"

To readers familiar with the subject, it illustrated basic Montenegrin character or, at least a caricature thereof: A male-dominated society where the women are expected to stay at home and toil while the men sit around being important — and sipping what was commonly called "Turkish" coffee — thick, black, sweet and served in tiny cups. In this instance the well-known *Borba* cartoonist, Dragan Savić (1923–2009), captured the moment when Yugoslavia raised consumer prices by more than twenty percent. In the case of Montenegrin men, their coffee had been priced out of reach, but they had to have it, even if only a tiny sip — and in the most prominent site in Titograd, the capital (since 1992 called by its pre-Communist name, Podgorica). The cartoon, which I retained, was a humorous take on a grave matter for most Yugoslavs and I took it as a tip to write an article on the significance of the huge price increases.

Considering the size of the republic — 5,019 square miles (a little larger than Connecticut) — and a population today of 660,000, Montenegro played larger roles than might have been expected, and it boasts: a major poet, Petar II Petrović-Njegoš (1813–1851); a rare legacy of striving for independence which began in the eleventh century and continued with interruptions to the present day; and, already in the eighteenth century, an alliance with Russia.

I did not travel to Montenegro during my stint as a "Balkan correspondent." But I did journey to the small republic in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

I also came to know the leading Montenegrin of his day, Milovan Djilas (Đilas) (1911–1995). Immensely proud of his origins, he was unequivocal on the issue that still divides people of the Black Mountains. Montenegrins, he said "are basically Serbs." (In support of that thesis, in 1918, the last year in which Montenegro was a royal domain, the Kingdom's passports carried the entry: "Nationality — Serb; Citizenship — Montenegrin.)"

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4. *Borba* (The Struggle) the daily newspaper published by the Socialist League of Working People of Yugoslavia (a.k.a Communist Party).

5. *Crna Gora*, Black Mountain (Montenegro) in Serbo-Croatian.

My acquaintance with Djilas began by way of *The New York Times*, whose foreign editor informed me early on that the newspaper had a sort of institutional relationship with the man who at that time was the most famous dissident in the entire Communist world, stretching from Beijing to Moscow and on to Cuba. He was serving the third of his three prison terms (first under the Royal Yugoslav government and then under the Yugoslav Communist regime he had helped to create). His connection with the paper began on Christmas Day 1954 when an interview he gave was published in *The Times* at great length. In his talk with Jack Raymond, one of my "Balkan Correspondent" predecessors, Djilas accused the party-state headed by Tito of preserving "totalitarianism." I dutifully proceeded five blocks south to No. 8 Palmotićeva Street to the Djilas apartment where his wife Stefica, resided with their son, Aleksa, then ten years old. I followed — unwritten — rules by not engaging in political discussions with Stefica — on the likely assumption the walls had microphones. I brought small presents — including toys for Aleksa. In February 1966, Stefica spoke at length about her husband's incarceration, which had just entered its ninth year — that he had just completed a translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and was contemplating other writing projects; that he was now supplied with regular writing paper instead of having to use toilet paper; that he wore gloves in winter because his cell was so cold that water froze. Urged on by Stefica Djilas (herself a Partizan *prvoborac*, mobilized "from the first day" in 1941 and decorated for bravery!). I wrote an article describing the conditions of Milovan's incarceration in the very prison, Sremska Mitrovica, where he had been locked up before the war. A day after the Djilas article appeared, I was called to the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs and given a sharp dressing down by Cvijeto Job (1926–), a press officer who spoke flawless English:

"As long as you keep writing articles and editorials about the sufferings of Djilas and demand that he be freed, we will do nothing — you fail to understand that we will never do anything under pressure." He then added, *sotto voce*, that there had been plans to release Djilas in the summer and that my article had set them back! In the following month, Djilas' biography of Montenegro's greatest author, *Njegoš, Poet-Prince-Bishop*, was published in New York. (He had completed it in 1959 but could not get the text published in Tito's Yugoslavia.) Djilas was released ten months later — on New Year's Eve — which was five weeks before he would have begun the tenth year of a total of fifteen years to which Tito's courts had sentenced him.

Returning to Yugoslavia in later years, I would stop by 8 Palmotićeva to visit the Djilases. One time I told Milovan that I had been threatened with expulsion from Romania for writing that the dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, was not known or recognized in the countryside a year after he had

assumed power. Djilas grinned and commented with a glint in his eyes, “If I had been in power I would have had you arrested.” Who knows? I thought, he might have.

After having given up smoking — in 1953 (when his son was born) — Djilas gave me two of his precious meerschaum pipes, which I enjoyed for years. I stopped smoking after his death in 1995, and presented the pipes to his son. (Aleksa, in the meantime, had become a noted scholar.)

Djilas grew up in such poverty that he could not even have afforded to buy a pipe. He wore homespun and did not have undershorts until he entered high school, he told me. Pitchpine torches provided illumination in his home.

Helga, my wife, accompanied me in 1984 to Montenegro in a small rental Renault to explore its jagged mountains and seacoast and to absorb something of its history. In earlier times, its heights had been studded with groves of black pines, casting them in inky tones that prompted the term “black mountains” as early as the thirteenth century, when the region was called the principality of Zeta. (Most likely it was bestowed by Venetians, who were the great power in the region and allied to Montenegrin chiefs.) Over the following centuries, peasants cut down trees for firewood and cleared small plots for crops, creating myriad patches of white limestone. From then on, only the night returned these mountains to the full darkness of their original sobriquet.

The winding road climbs the slope of the mountain called Lovčen and crosses a saddle to Cetinje, the lofty Potsdam of the Balkans, with its tiny palace at an elevation of 2,200 feet. The lofty site was chosen as a capital when the ruler Ivan Crnojević, facing the irresistible encroachment of Ottoman forces, retreated from fortress of Zabljak on the eastern bank of Lake Skadar to this bowl of limestone in the late fifteenth century to preserve the essence of Montenegro from the Turks. Although he was a vassal of the city state of Venice, he was also obliged to pay tribute to the Turks in the more comfortable lowlands. A small stream named Cetina crossed the shallow valley and there, amid shepherds’ huts, Ivan built a castle, erected a monastery and set up his court in 1482. Both were later destroyed by the invading forces of Turkish pashas. The stream disappeared, too, sucked into the karstic caverns below, but it left behind its name for the new capital: Cetinje. Ivan’s son, Djurad, brought a printing press from Venice to the Cetinje monastery. In 1494 a monk, Makarije, printed the first book of the south Slavs — Cyrillic texts of liturgical hymns. At the time, the population of the Montenegrin lands was well under 100,000.

The conjuncture of the majestic with the rustic was ever present. The building constructed for the Montenegrin Senate in 1831 by Prince-Bishop Petar II (born Radivoje “Rade” Tomov Petrović) in 1813 when Montenegro was not yet a recognized state. It was partitioned, we learned, so that the

senators entered on one side, while cattle were penned on the other. In the mid-nineteenth century a senator, Stevan Perkov Vukotić from the village Cevo, walked fourteen miles barefoot in the rain to Cetinje carrying his leather sandals to keep them dry for honorable entry into the Senate chambers.

Nearby stands the Tablja Tower, erected by Njegoš in 1833, and, by ancient custom, decorated with the severed heads of Turks killed in battle — a custom he abolished in 1850. This remarkable man astonished an English traveler by aiming a rifle and shooting a lemon tossed in the air by one of his soldiers — "a singular accomplishment for a bishop," the visitor recorded.

But my favorite Njegoš stories were of his 1851 visit to Italy, where he had gone to seek a cure for the tuberculosis that killed him two years later. In Rome, when it was suggested that he kiss the chains of St. Peter in Rome, Njegoš refused, saying: "A Montenegrin does not kiss chains." Later, at the rim of smoking Vesuvius he asked a guard for a rifle to shoot into the crater, as if to strike Satan.

He designed his residence, a twenty-five-room structure (with gun ports!). In it he placed a billiard table imported from Austria and soon became skilled at the game. In his short life he composed epic poems, designed and minted a coin, wrote a play, published a Serbian grammar and founded schools. In 1846 he published his epic poem *Gorski Vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath), in which his ancestor, Bishop Danilo I, figures as a hero defying the Turks.

Njegoš declared his approval of the unification of Serbs, but wished to retain his — Montenegrin — spiritual authority. When he died, aged thirty-eight, they laid him out on the green baize of the billiard table and his ninety-eight-year-old father bent over and kissed his right hand. (His building became known as *Biliarda*.) Njegoš was buried near the top of Mount Lovčen (elevation 5,738 feet) in a small chapel he had himself designed.

Isidora Sekulić, (1877–1958), a brilliant Serbian essayist, wrote of Njegoš' land: "The classical Montenegro was a terrible reality. One small creative people made, in that wasteland and poverty, three great things: a poetic language, an ethic of humaneness that filled everyone and every rifle — and freedom raised up to the highest level." These qualities were embodied in Njegoš, she wrote in her 1951 book of essays entitled *To Njegoš, A Book of Devotion* (which the Montenegrin Djilas savagely attacked as "bourgeois" before publishing his own Njegoš biography.

Among Cetinje's martial and spiritual monuments, we visited was one that combined both strains of the Montenegrin past: The Vlach Church was erected about 1450 by the Latinate-speaking shepherds descended from Roman colonists of the Adriatic littoral in gratitude for Slav protection against the depredations of the Turks. Its fence was made of 1,550 Turkish rifle barrels seized in

battle. (The enduring presence of Vlachs in Montenegro is marked by the names of its highest mountains: Visitor and Durmitor.)

We had come to Cetinje from Montenegro's northwestern frontier, bordering Croatia, on Boka Kotorska, the splendid, winding Bay of Kotor (geologically a submerged river canyon). Our first stop was at Herceg Novi, a town founded in the late fourteenth century by Bosnia's King Tvrtko and later ruled by a succession of dukes (*herceg*, hence its name).

It passed through a number of hands — Turks, Spaniards, Venetians, Austrians, Russians and French — until 1813, when it finally came under sovereignty of Montenegro. Some of the alien powers returned over the next century but the port reverted to Slavic suzerainty at the conclusion of World War I. Its population was more than 30,000.

A Herceg Novi resident, Radmila Bošković, mother of a Washington friend, told us the town was the "rainiest spot in Europe." When we later checked, the annual average precipitation was listed above 196 inches, the continent's highest. A formidable woman, "Mama Beba," as she liked to be called, remembered being stopped on a Herceg Novi street by a neighbor who had received high Partizan decorations for his wartime service, who mocked her family's allegiance to non-Communist (Chetnik) leaders. "If you are a man, pull out your pistol!" she challenged him. The hero blushed and slunk way, but afterward had his revenge. She was jailed on a charge of "insulting a People's Hero."

We drove on a few miles to Risan, the home (as *Rhizon*), of the region's first naval power, famed for piracy — a practice that lasted at least one and one-half millennia. This was the Illyria of Queen Teuta. At the base of the bay, up against the mountains was the tiny town of Risan, with a population of thousands when it was her redoubt. Legend had it that she ordered a protective chain drawn across the narrows at a site called *Verige* (or "chain" — which at a distance of 3,000 feet seems improbable — even the 2007 version of tying the north side of the Verige strait to the south with a highway bridge has languished). Another legend held that she drowned herself in 228 B.C. in the bay rather than submit to the invading Romans. Risan still displays Roman mosaics, the finest being of the Greek god of dreams, Hypnos.

The next stop, two miles to the south as we made our way through places rich in Montenegrin history, was Perast, home of legendary sailors and shipbuilders. The village's seamen mostly served Venice, which through its formidable sea power had established the Venetian Albanian Republic stretching along the Adriatic from Zadar (now Croatia) south to Durres (now Albania). This little remembered creation lasted 377 years. Venetian *Perasto* became the last rampart of the republic to

pull down the flag bearing the Lion of St. Mark in 1797. At the time, the town's population was 1,643. It is around 500 today.

In the epic battle of Lepanto in 1571 between an Ottoman fleet and the ultimately victorious Fleet of the Holy League of Maritime Catholic States, eight brave men of Perast were killed — some of them navigators. Altogether 490 vessels bearing a total of 90,000 sailors and soldiers took part in the clash near the bay of Patras on the western Greek coast — the last major sea battle fought with galleys maneuvered by oarsmen. Some of the Venetian galleys engaged in the battle were constructed by Perast shipwrights.

Boka Kotorska continued to flourish, harboring over 300 vessels, including overseas sailing ships at its height in the eighteenth century. But Perast's days of grandeur came to an end with the political and economic disruptions of the Napoleonic Wars. In a few decades, the skills of its shipwrights and navigators became redundant as steel and steam engines replaced timber and sails and modern navigational instruments performed tasks previously learned by men over years of experiencing the ways of winds, currents and tides.

Among those celebrated Perast sailors were Marko Martinović (1663–1716) and Matija Zmajević (1680–1735), both of whom won fame in the service of Russia's Tsar Peter I. Martinović, a gifted ship builder as well as a navigator, opened a school in Perast in 1700 to which Tsar Peter sent Russian boyars to be trained in the nautical sciences. Zmajević won battles for Tsar Peter in the Baltic Sea against the Swedes and was appointed an admiral in the newly created Russian fleet. Montenegro's Russian connection began at this time. Russian envoys visited Montenegro in 1711, in part because of the Montenegrins defiance of their common enemy, Ottoman Turkey. The following year 8,000 Montenegrins won a great battle against an army of 50,000 Turks. But in 1714, a force of more than twice as many Turks swept into Montenegro and burned many towns to the ground. Prince Danilo I Petrović-Njegoš escaped to a cave where he declared his foreign policy consisted of "Moscow, Moscow, Moscow" and thence he journeyed in the following year to call on Tsar Peter.

Thus, Montenegro became Russia's ally, principally against the Turks. This paid off a century later when Tsar Alexander I sought to block Napoleon's designs in the Adriatic. A fleet under his Vice Admiral, Dmitry Senyavin (1763–1831) took control of the southern Adriatic, disrupted Dubrovnik's trade and gained support on land from Montenegro's princes. The Russians persuaded Austria to surrender Kotor to the rulers of Cetinje in 1806. Montenegro was rewarded again in 1898 at the Congress of Berlin when Russia backed its recognition as a principality by the Great Powers. Along with that, Prince Nikola (Petrović) also was granted the valuable ports of Bar and Ulcinj

(from Turkey). It was Moscow's ally in the Russian Japanese War in which Montenegrin volunteers fought. In 1905 Cetinje decreed Japan to be an enemy state, a declaration of war that remained in force until 2006! This alliance of the midget with the giant gave rise to a Montenegrin boast early in the twentieth century: "Together, we are one hundred million!" (Montenegro still holds favor with Russians, who today own 40 percent of its real estate!)

We proceeded eight miles south to Kotor. It was, like Risan, of Illyrian origin and appealing to foreign powers near and far. After conquering Queen Teuta's forces, Romans settled here in the second century BC, followed by Byzantium's Emperor Justinian who built a fort here in 635, which was plundered by (Arab) Saracens in 842 and also briefly by Bulgaria's Tsar Samuilo in 1002. Boka Kotorska's Venetian era was interrupted twice by Ottoman invaders who seized Herceg Novi and Risan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and occupied Kotor 1538–1571 and 1657–1699. Otherwise, its nearly three miles of 65-foot ramparts and towering bastions withstood numerous assaults. Subsequent occupiers included the French Empire of Napoleon at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire which stationed its Fifth Fleet in the bay during World War I. In addition to ramparts, Venetian control fostered Roman Catholicism. Kotor has had a bishopric for more than 1,000 years and one-third of the Boka population remains Roman Catholic.

It was a shock to discover that heavy damage caused by a (7.4 Richter scale) earthquake on April 15, 1979 was still evident — although other nearby sites suffered more and altogether 136 people were killed in the tremor. Montenegro's coast lies on a fault line and quakes registered in 1563 and 1667 had already toppled many buildings.

We drove southward along a valley below Mount Lovčen and as the road suddenly descended the saddle, the coves and villages of the Adriatic (derived from the Illyrian *adur* for "sea") came into view and stretched all the way down to the frontier of Albania.

At this moment thunderheads rushed eastward pushing giant waterspouts before them which tore ashore, ripped up some trees, and then evaporated above the mountains as swiftly as they had appeared, like earthquakes — live metaphors for the sudden violence in Montenegrin history. Now stopping in Budva, an ancient harbor settlement that had lately become a tourist mecca, we did pause just to the south to stroll in Sveti Stefan, a tiny peninsula fortified in the fifteenth century against the Ottomans that was transformed into an exclusive resort already attracting royalty in the 1930s and film stars in the 1970s. Then we paused at the new Hotel Sozina in Sutomore, another Venetian town with a sandy beach a few miles further on. That evening we swam in the refreshing sea and

discovered that gentle waves made the small red, gray and blue rocks on the bottom scrape and bump against each other with an almost musical rhythm and soft percussion. That night a trio played in the Sozina's small ballroom and a young man danced alone in swirling steps, loudly singing a single word, *šuškavica! šuškavica! suskavica*! Much later I learned that it meant "rustling! rustling! rustling!" perhaps not that far removed from the sounds of the nearby rocks of the Adriatic.

Just to the south were olive groves, with some close to 2,000 years old with tree-trunks more than 20 feet thick, on the edge of Bar, another ancient, peacefully multiethnic harbor town. Its Roman Catholic diocese was created in the ninth century, its first Orthodox church in the eleventh, and its first mosque in the seventeenth.

In Bar's outdoor market, we saw an Albanian woman wearing and displaying fine linens she had woven. When I raised a camera to take her picture she quickly hid her face, probably fearing an evil eye, a common superstition in the Balkans. She was also a reminder that Bar, now one of Yugoslavia's busiest ports, had been part of Ottoman Albania less than a century before. Now the frontier was twenty-five miles down the coast.

We proceeded to Ulcinj, having been colonized by Black Sea Greeks (from Colchis) in the fifth century BC, is perhaps the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in Montenegro. It boasted both an age-old harbor and in modern times, long sandy beaches that catered to nude bathers. We came upon a spectacle that seemed to reflect the saying that "the sweat of a Montenegrin is the most expensive fluid in the world" — a man riding astride the family donkey while his wife trotted behind bearing a huge bundle of sticks. (Among the many "lazy-Montenegrin" jests was the riddle: "Why does a Montenegrin keep a chair by his bed? So he can sit down and rest after he gets up."

From there it was just a hop to the Bojana, a river fed by the Black Drin flowing out of Lake Ohrid (between Macedonia and Albania), and the White Drin flowing from Kukes in northern Albania. Did the Bojana thus carry some of the famed trout of Ohrid some 200 miles upstream, as had been documented in the past? We did not find out, although we met a fisherman cleaning his nets on the northern bank of what was here a broad waterway forming a small portion of the frontier with Albania. A narrow dirt road led east to a plateau with the remains of the dead town of Svac, which in the Middle Ages, according to a legend, boasted 366 churches. One for each day of a leap year. Now only the shells of stone buildings still stand where Stefan Vojislav (1000–1043), the ruler of the Serbian state called Duklja, once held court. But Svac was razed to the ground 200 years later by a horde of Mongol horsemen led by Batu Khan, grandson of Ghenghis Khan. Svac was rebuilt. But when Ottoman Turks devastated it again in 1571 the survivors lost heart and abandoned the

ruins. Now we saw wildflowers blooming light pink, purple, yellow and blue among the piles of foundation stones. Hawks soared overhead.

Down the road a half mile was Lake Šasko where fishermen poled skiffs on the sparkling waters framed in the distance by the violet mountains of northern Albania. A small hotel had restaurant tables on a promontory. A waiter appeared and said the only item available on the menu was fresh *skakavica* which translated as "springfish" but was otherwise unidentifiable (many years later a friend determined that was a thin-lip grey mullet, which is found in both fresh and brackish waters). On this warm day, the shirtsleeved waiter placed two *skakavica* on a grill, slit their backs in a dozen places and stuffed a garlic clove in each, then lit the fire. Served with pickled cucumbers, bread and a white Dubrovačka wine — delicious.

A newly paved road led us swiftly up to the heights of 2,000-foot Rumija range that separates the Adriatic from Lake Skadar. To the south we could see the spires of Shkoder, the northern city which spells the lake's name in the Albanian fashion. We were intermittently enveloped in clouds. Below, when the lake came into view, we saw the remains of Byzantine cloisters on small islands — Maračnik, Beška, Gorica — built more than a millennium ago and inhabited by hermit ascetics in Byzantine times, much like the Skellig Michael off the west coast of Ireland.

We picked up a young hitchhiker who introduced himself as Cesmir Veljović, who asked to stop about twenty miles up the road. Pointing down from a height of perhaps 1,500 feet, he said: "I live right down there, the house with the balcony. "Come visit me any time."

We descended in long loops past orchards of pomegranates and lemons. Clusters of prickly green husks hung from the branches of old chestnut trees with trunks four feet thick. What had the poet said? "A land where everything, even the flowers can prick." From the lake shore, flocks of birds were visible among the lily pads: cormorants, herons, pelicans, pelicans. There was Virpazar, where on July 13, 1941 Montenegrins launched the first uprising against the Nazi-Fascist forces who had invaded royal Yugoslavia three months earlier. The rebellion focused entirely on Mussolini's Blackshirts, who had begun annexing coastal areas of the country. It involved nationalists, royalists and Communists (well before they had begun fighting each other). In Virpazar atop a rock column was a heroic metal sculpture commemorating the first Montenegrin fighter killed in the revolt.

Across the bay was the island of Vranjina where yet another cloister was perched with its thirteenth century Church of St. Nikola, whose protector was Ilarion, a student of Saint Sava, founder of Serbian Orthodoxy. Its charter in 1296 mentioned the name "Montenegro" for the first

time. Only a century later did the Serbian families who eventually established a distinctly Montenegrin royal line come into prominence.

We did not pause for long in Titograd, as Podgorica was called from 1946 to 1992. True, it had been a settlement since the Stone Age, and as Doclea in Greek and Roman times had a population of more than 8,000. Slavs appeared as early as the fifth century. *Duklja* is the Slavic version of the name. But almost nothing of its earlier centuries remained. After four centuries of Ottoman rule, Podgorica was finally ceded by the Turks in 1878.

Instead we headed thirty-one miles north to the Ostrog Monastery while driving on switchback roads with hairpin turns ever higher to a parking lot from where we could see, 200 feet higher, the whitewashed seventeenth-century chapel perched in a crevice in the sheer mountainside. Turkish soldiers had stormed the church several times in the nineteenth century, but Montenegrin defenders managed to save most of its holy treasures. Over the decades, Ostrog had become the bourn of Orthodox pilgrimages, during which scores of pilgrims, some blind, others lame, bore votive candles, and flasks to fill with the water from the spring named for Saint *Vasile* (Basil), the monastery's founder. At dusk, vesper bells, echoing down the deep valley, rang seven times as monks began the evensong.

Montenegro had lost its independence (and kingdom) in 1918 when it was incorporated in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It regained a measure of republican statehood in 1945 in Socialist Federal Yugoslavia and, following a referendum, proclaimed itself an independent republic on June 3, 2006. Later that month, it became the 192nd member of the United Nations.

Appropriately, one of my last visits to Montenegro took place in 2001 at the Hotel Crna Gora, the setting of Dragan Savić's cartoon thirty-six years earlier.

At the time, Milo Djukanović (1962–) was serving as president, after having already been a three-term prime minister — an office he would hold twice more. Djukanović, who had started political life as a protégé of Serbia's Slobodan Milošević, soon profited hugely by presiding over a cigarette smuggling racket involving shipments, sometimes in speedboats, from Italy and from Malta mainly to Montenegrin ports like Bar.

The occasion for my visit was a reunion with Velizar Brajović, a journalist of the daily *Monitor*, who brought a friend for coffee in the hotel restaurant. He asked me what brought me there. I told him that I was traveling through Balkan countries to report on trans-border crime such as sex trafficking and cigarette-smuggling. I then made my first (and last) pun in Serbo-Croatian (a language I speak inexpertly). Playing on *djuvan*, the word for tobacco, I brought up the name of

President Djukanović, who had already been indicted by a prosecutor in Bari, Italy (just across the Adriatic narrows) for his role in the smuggling of millions of dollars worth of cigarettes through Montenegrin ports. I said:

"I understand that your President – what's his name? ... Djuvanović? …(the equivalent of "tobacco-vić") is heavily implicated in smuggling…."

Brajović rewarded me with laughter — even though he was on record as an enthusiastic supporter of Djukanović.

GREECE

Acquaintance with things Greek began in autumn 1940 when Benito Mussolini notified Athens that Italy required certain "strategic locations" in Greece — and Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas replied "that means war!" (This was interpreted immediately as Οχι (No!)). Italy invaded that same day — and October 28 became *Οχι* Day for Greeks around the world. Il Duce's troops were soon driven back by a Greek army fiercely defending its homeland. My father, Carroll Binder, the foreign editor of *The Chicago Daily News*, had excited my interest in Europe as World War II approached so I knew something of what was going on.

In those days Carroll Binder had three correspondents stationed in the Balkans: Leland Stowe (1899-1994), Leigh White (1914–1985?) and George Weller (1907–2002). As was common with the "CDN" correspondents, they became friends of my family, and visited our home. I met them. They were prolific writers. Leland Stowe's *No Other Road to Freedom* (1944) recounted some of his wartime experiences in Greece including an interview with Metaxas shortly after the Italian invasion. The intrepid Leigh White, battle-tested as a correspondent in Spain during the Civil War, was wounded by the guns of a Stuka dive bomber in the Mediterranean while trying to sail from the Balkans to Egypt with two other correspondents. He was treated for five months in an Athens hospital before being repatriated (as a neutral) in September 1941 to the United States. He recapitulated this and other adventures in his 1944 book, *The Long Balkan Night*. George Weller spent four months in Athens in spring 1941, nine weeks of which he spent as a prisoner of the Gestapo. In July of that year he was "traded" by the German occupation authorities for a German journalist held captive by the Allies.

Having been sent to a Quaker school (1946-1949) where there were no classes dealing with current events and being far from my father's attention to foreign affairs, I was largely uninformed about the agonies of Greece's Civil War which stretched through those very years. Rather, I was reading a translation of Sophocles plays by Lewis Campbell (1907), including the memorable chorus in *Antigone,* which begins:

> Many the wonder lives and moves, but the wonder of all is man
> One while he moves toward evil, and one while toward good….

I also devoured *The Peloponnesian Wars* of Thucydides — a favorite of my elder brother. Then I was chosen for the role of grim Creon in my Pennsylvania Quaker high school's staging of the Jean Anouilh version of *Antigone*.

After high school, I read the former *Chicago Daily News* reporter George Weller's gripping 1949 novel of the Greek Civil War, *Crack in the Column*, which recapitulated his knowledge of pre-war Greece as well as his experience of the Greek Civil War. He dedicated the novel to his colleague George Polk (at whose marriage he served as best man! (About Polk, more, later.)). Remarkably, in those notoriously anti-Communist times, his tale dealt sympathetically with the famed Leftist commanders, Aris Velouchiotis, and George Siantos, using their real names. (Weller, 1907-2002, was the sole CDN reporter to win a Pulitzer prize for his foreign correspondence and he had also become a family friend.)

Meanwhile in the spring of 1948, I heard from Mrs. Tamara Hassilev, the mother of a classmate, who worked for a Greek shipping company, that there was a possibility of working passage to Europe on a Greek freighter and, would I be interested? And how! I went to the bottom of Manhattan to the offices of the A. Aristomenis Shipping Company to inquire about possibilities.

"Can you be in New Orleans in a week?" asked Mr. Koutsouvelis, the office manager.

"No." I replied

"All right, Norfolk on Tuesday."

"If I could afford to go to Norfolk, I wouldn't be asking." I said.

"All right, Philadelphia, Thursday."

Philadelphia was only a half hour by train from my school, where I was just finishing classes. Five days later, toting a US Army surplus duffel bag I arrived at the Philadelphia coal piers. Freighters were lined up to load coal for needy Western Europe. Soon I found the ship designated by Mr. Koutsouvelis, the *SS Aristopais* (Good Boy), 14,000-tons, flying a Panamanian flag-of-convenience. It had been launched three years earlier as the *SS Haym Solomon* (honoring the financer of the American Revolution). From the railing a seaman whom I later came to know as a Jimmy, from Liverpool, shouted:

"Hey, ya got a spanner, mate?"

"What's that?"

"A wrench,"

"No."

"Well, ya better get one."

When I climbed on board he explained that many of the shipmates were homosexuals and some of might be aggressive. Carrying a wrench might protect me. Minutes later when I entered the gangway amidships a large hand gripped my arm, blocking me for a moment. I shook it off and that was the end of it.

Except for a tall seaman from Jamaica and Jimmy, the Liverpudlian, and myself, the crew of 40 was entirely Greek, most of them from Chios, an island famed not only for its merchant seamen but also for its ship-owners. Most of the time as an ordinary seaman (the lowest rank), I was expected to work on deck, helping put the heavy hatch covers in place and chipping paint, calling the watch. Three nights out an able bodied Chian seaman guided me up on the bridge to be the helmsman. He told me to take the wheel, of polished oak, which came up almost to my chin. Under his guidance it was a matchless thrill to steer the Aristopais at 10 knots through the mild swells and to learn to adjust for the Atlantic currents.

The ship's mess was shared by officers and crew. Captain Caravias had his own table, but he was served the same meals as the rest of us. I learned enough pidgin Greek to discover that one of the regular items on the menu was canned squid — something I had never heard of, having grown up in the Middle West. I chattered away with the others until Captain Caravias interrupted one evening:

"Shut up! At the table you do not talk. You eat. So, shut up and eat!"

The other Greek memory I carried from the Aristopais was an oiler from the engine room, a wiry Chian with chiseled features who was an amateur sculptor. He showed me the remarkable bust he was making of another sailor. It made me think of a photo of the Hermes of Praxiteles.

Several years later, when I was working in Minneapolis (as a copy boy), my Greek shipboard days guided me to a broadcast on a local station of a one-hour program of Greek songs, with their appealing (if incomprehensible) songs and skirling reed accompaniments. More than half a century later I still think of the *Aristopais* as "my" ship. I followed her sea life as best I could. *Aristopais* later sailed under Belgian and Soviet flags, and once I spotted a photo of a ship with her name clearly painted on the prow in *Life Magazine*. Her life ended in a scrap yard at the Yugoslav harbor of Split at the age of 24.That was it for me with Greece, until 1963.

I arrived in the month of June in Athens for the first time in the days before air conditioning (the average high at that time of year is 85 degrees). I walked a mile from the Grande Bretagne hotel to the office in the Kolonaki district's Haritos Street of Mario Modiano (1926–), correspondent of *The*

Times of London and stringer for *The New York Times*. As neat as a male model in a well-pressed tan suit and narrow necktie, he looked at me sweating and asked, alarmed: "Are you ill?"

Mario was, I learned, not a Greek, but a citizen of Greece, from an ancient Ladino family (originally from Spain, with a pause in Modigliano, Italy before settling in Salonika — now Thessaloniki—where Modianos started a long line of rabbis in the sixteenth century).

The headline above my first story from the Greek capital sounds eerie in the autumn of 2011 as I write this: "Efforts to End Greek Government Crisis Snarled." It was NOT an economic problem then, when Greece still had a monarchy. The issue of the day in 1963 was the insistence of King Paul and his spouse, Frederika, on making a royal visit to Britain — against the stern warning of Prime Minister Constantine Caramanlis. Spurred by his vain and notoriously obstinate (German) spouse who had already defied the constitution to interfere in electoral politics, the monarch chose to accept the Prime Minister's resignation (June 17, 1963) rather than make a "cowardly" bow to "Communist" agitation against the royal pair. This was my early introduction to the violent struggle between the Greek Left and the Greek Right that repeatedly tore the country apart for three decades.

Viewed in retrospect, June 17, 1963 set off a sequence of events that mirrored a classic Greek tragedy: Caramanlis failed to win reelection and went into exile in November 1963. George Papandreou of the center-left won election as Prime Minister in February 1964; King Paul died a month later and was succeeded by his son, Constantine who, prodded by Frederika, staged a royal coup in 1965; Army colonels organized a coup April 21, 1967; Constantine's counter-coup in 1968 failed — he fled country; another coup by Gen. Dimitrios Ioannides in 1973. Old guard politicians met with military chiefs in July 1974 and pleaded for the return of Caramanlis as Prime Minister.

In 1963 with the help of Mario Modiano, I located a leader of the EDA, the generally pro-Communist United Democratic Left party, which had been denouncing Greece's royal couple for months as promoters of Fascist policies. He was Manolis Glezos, then aged 40. A native of the island of Naxos in the Cyclades chain, he attended high school in Athens where he gravitated to the political left. When the *Wehrmacht* occupied the capital April 27 1941, steel-helmeted soldiers raised Hitler's swastika flag over the Acropolis — the most revered site in Greece — then Glezos and Apostolas Santas, a fellow teenager, climbed the Acropolis a month later and tore down the hated banner, an act which electrified the nation and spurred resistance to the occupation. By the time I met him, Glezos had been behind bars — and tortured for seven years — several years by German and Italians Fascists and five by Greek Fascists. In freedom, he was a jolly host, sporting a trademark handlebar mustache. No, he said to a question, he did not think the country was ruled by

Fascists in 1963, but, “We feel that fascism is knocking at the door in Greece.” He was proven right eight years later when right wing military officers seized power. He spent four more years as their political prisoner.

In those early Greek days, I attended performances of the inspired music of Mikis Theodorakis who initially composed symphonic works, then broadened his spectrum to include popular tunes, among them the score for the film *Zorba The Greek*. At the same time, his contemporary Manos Hatzidakis (born in 1925 as was Theodorakis) was turning out hit after hit, including the title song of the film *Never on Sunday*. Theodarakis was a man of the Greek Left who had served during the war in a reserve unit of ELAS (Greek Peoples Liberation Army) and had later been held in island prison where he was tortured. Hatzidakis was basically apolitical. The two who were in some ways rivals and in others they complemented each other — Mikis hard, and Manos soft. Both composed in a style called Entekhno meaning “art song” with touches of folk rhythms and melodies. Both also composed for the traditional stringed instrument called bouzouki.

In October, Mario Modiano and I agreed to divide up coverage of the election proclaimed as a solution to the issue created by King Paul. He would cover central Greece and I would go north — to (the original) Macedonia which was the native province of Caramanlis. As Mario later noted, he canvassed Thessaly while I toured Macedonia with a savvy translator where I did shoe-leather reporting from Alexandroupolis in the east to Florina in the west. Wherever we went, we found respect for what Caramanlis had accomplished in the past but also a desire to try a new man. When I wrote this, the flinty Prime Minister called Mario to his office and complained that “these views were biased and the report was not worthy of *The New York Times*.”

The elections on November 3 were narrowly won by the Center Union’s George Papandreou. Early next morning, Caramanlis decided to go into (self-imposed) exile to Paris, where he was to remain the next eleven years. Before he left he told Mario, who had come his home in Karneadou Street, that he was “sorry to have reacted so negatively” to *The New York Times* report from Macedonia. When Mario told me this, I placed Constantine Caramanlis in my (small) private pantheon of decent politicians.

Mario’s recollection of those times — nearly half a century later — started with the Caramanlis defeat-Papandreou victory:

> That election touched off a sequence of events in Greece punctuated by repeated crises that culminated in a rift between Papandreou and the

> Palace and a sequence of makeshift cabinets that sought to keep Papandreou and especially his ultra-radical son Andreas out of power. In 1967 a junta of colonels seized power, falsely claiming a danger of a Communist coup.

(…I was pleased to see that my memory echoed his.)

The issue of Cyprus continued to intrude in Athenian politics as Nicosia strove to exploit the island's newly conferred independence (1960) after eight decades under British rule. But Greece, while quietly coveting *Enosis* (the union of Cyprus with Greece), was officially demanding that Cyprus, with its overwhelmingly Greek population, be granted absolute independence. The island's Turks feared this alone would threaten their very existence. Inter-communal fighting resumed. When I stopped briefly in Athens in January 1964, some thug-like Cypriote politicians approached me and tried to enlist me in their cause. There were no major Cyprus flare-ups during my Balkan days, largely sparing me from that monstrously divisive issue where each ethnic side tried to be more intransigent than the other.

On February 16 came the landslide re-election of Papandreou (scarcely a week after his seventy-sixth birthday). He had campaigned on a phony platform of denouncing the exiled Caramanlis for having fostered "corruption" and "dictatorship." He brought his forty-five-year-old economist son, Andreas, who held American citizenship for twenty years — and who had just given it up — into the government with him.

Two weeks later some 4,000 students demonstrated in front of the American Embassy and shouted "America, keep your hands off Cyprus!" "American murderers," "Yankees back to Texas," "Bravo Russia" and chants of "Greece, Get out of NATO," "You killed Kennedy" … and shouted some slogans against Papandreou himself. (Kennedy had been enormously popular in Greece and his wife Jacqueline, also popular, had visited Athens five months earlier.) The demonstration was fueled by suspicion that the United States sided with Turkey on the Cyprus issue. Papandreou voiced regret that Communists were involved in the demonstration, but refused to let the police interfere with the students. The American Embassy was lodged in a fortress-like building scarcely two years old on the north side of the broad Queen Sophia Boulevard. The boxlike structure, designed by Walter Gropius, who utilized white Greek marble, lay only a few blocks north of Papandreou's official office.

It was an inauspicious beginning for Papandreou, who was already viewed with some suspicion by the American Embassy, which had traditionally supported right-wing parties. The Greek military also had doubts about a center-left government. A week later King Paul died, which put his son

Constantine on the throne and created a new factor of uncertainty in Greek politics. It took the heir more than a year, during which his relations with the Prime Minister, five decades his senior, deteriorated to the point where they were not even talking to each other.

At issue were Papandreou's efforts to wrest the Ministry of Defense from control by the senior military officers. The King then arranged a split in the Prime Minister's notoriously divided Center Union Party, which enabled him to demand Papandreou's resignation in July 1965. I arrived in Athens a month later amid continuing parliamentary turmoil. Elias Tsirimokos, a Center Union cabinet minister, tried to form a government but his past as a former Leftist resistance fighter made him unacceptable to both his colleagues and the palace. George Papandreou's fortunes had also sagged in his party because he was so intent on promoting his son. Andreas, serving as Economics Minister (a powerful position) had even greater ambitions and had already created a host of enemies by making contacts with politically sympathetic junior army officers — meaning Leftists (but not Communists).

These officers who had formed a group called *Aspida* (Shield) were arrested. Then and for the next year, during which twenty-eight officers were held in jail, Andreas strutted and boasted that his enemies had done him a great favor: "They tried to kill me off and instead they created me," he proudly told me in July 1966. He had developed a Leftist agenda for Greece: "a dash of socialism, redistribution of income to the poorer classes, trade with Eastern Europe," and (most dangerously) "political control of the army." Wittingly or not, he was playing with the political equivalent of the incendiary weapon known as Greek Fire. (…That was my last time in Greece as a "chief Balkan correspondent." But in 1974 it came back to haunt me when I published a piece in *The New York Times* detailing the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency with not only the Greek Royal House, and the Army officers who ousted the Center Union government and the monarchy, but also with Andreas Papandreou. In a statement published by the paper Aug. 4, 1974, he accused me of "attempting to damage the political reputation of Andreas Papandreou — arguing among other things that he has had support from the C.I.A.")

In the meantime by 1966 it also had become apparent that the youthful King Constantine had the power to get rid of an unwanted Prime Minister but not the skill to keep a successor in power.

In the space of ten months he went through five prime ministers. His feckless mucking about in politics, like his mother's — and doubtless inspired by her — ended by provoking a series of coups. The first, on April 21, 1967, was led by army colonels — who rounded up thousands of suspect leftists including Andreas AND George Papandreou. (The father was kept under house arrest until he

died in 1968. The son was released after eight months to go into exile.) In December 1967, Constantine tried his own coup. Its abysmal failure ended not only with his flight from Greece with his wife and the dowager queen, but also the monarchy, which was abolished by military leaders in 1973. He was allowed to return to the country for a few hours in 1981 to attend the burial of Frederika in the family tomb.

The next experience of Greece came in 1976, traveling with Helga, my wife, and three daughters, Julia, Andrea and Alena, to the small island of Ios. We had been invited for a summer holiday by a friend of two decades, Peter Haupt (1926-2003), to use his house — half way up on the path from the harbor to the town of Chora. White marble from the nearby Cyclades island of Naxos gleamed everywhere, including the tabletops on the Haupt porch. (Peter, a professor of architecture at Berlin's Technische Hochschule, later designed a classic amphitheater, which also utilized marble for seats, that was built above the town with the support of European Community funds.) Ios was reputed — among other sites — to be the place where Homer was buried and, perhaps just as important, where the classical poet's mother was born. Rather than exploring myths, we spent the bulk of our time on the northern shores of Ios, either on a golden beach to the east of the main harbor of Ormos or the dark rocks to the west. Wanting to explore the heights towering above Chora, we hired a guide with two donkeys to convey our younger daughters in case they tired. Andrea, eleven at the time, whose favorite toy from babyhood was a long-eared stuffed "EEE-ah," was thrilled. Her grin as she mounted the Greek beast was beatific. A few hundred yards up the stony path, her donkey halted, stiff-legged, ignored the driver's thrashing stick, and let loose a fire-hose-sized yellow stream so strong that it splashed up from the rocks onto the legs of the rider.

Andrea let out a howl. The driver burst into peals of laughter. Ignoring the commotion, the donkey went on relieving itself. Andrea demanded to dismount. I dismissed driver and beasts. We trudged back to the Haupt house. The next day, after having left the children behind, Helga and I toiled up the rocky trail to the top, 2,339 feet above the sea. The reward was a grassy green sward dotted with beehives below the ruins of a monastery from which the entire azimuth of the Aegean was clearly visible. As our Ios days drew to an end, I went to Ormos to book passage on the overnight ferry to Piraeus. On the departure day, a fierce wind began blowing from the north. When we gathered on the dock, we learned that the departure had been cancelled because of the force 7 (about 40 mph) Meltemi. I asked for my money back. The purser, grasping his money belt, said *no*. We went back and forth to the growing alarm of my family. Finally exasperated, I recalled an ancient imprecation (from Byzantine times) called the *moutza*. For the first (and last time) I extended the forefinger and

middle fingers of my right hand and uttered the simple curse: *Na*! He flinched, to the horror and shame of my wife and daughters. But the purser with trembling lips said I could retrieve the money from the shipping office on shore. For years afterward, my wife and daughters accused me of being an Ugly American on Ios.

Among the Greeks I encountered in the 1960s, there were only mild versions of the Greek Left — Andreas Papandreou for instance. It was not until the 1980s that I met the real stuff. In the summer of 1986, I learned that Markos Vafiadis, the legendary commander of the Greek People's Liberation Army (later called the Greek Democratic Army) in the Macedonia region (1942-1948), had returned from twenty-three years in forced exile, most of them in the Soviet Union. He returned to live quietly in Greece in 1983 after an amnesty enacted by Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou!

I was burning to meet him, not least because he had been the subject of one of the most remarkable journalistic adventures of the twentieth century. At the height of the Greek Civil War, Vafiadis (1906-1992) commanded as many as 47,000 fighters, first against the *Wehrmacht* and then against the Monarchist (and Fascist) forces of the Athens government, which were aided first by the British and then by the Americans. His only military training had been as an army draftee in the 1920s. He became a guerrilla fighter in 1942 in what rapidly became not only an anti-occupation force but also one fighting in a civil war.

At the height of his fame, when he was accorded the cover of TIME Magazine on April 5, 1948, "General Markos" (probably given this rank by his opponents) was living at an altitude of several thousand feet in the Pindus Mountains of northern Greece.

There he headed the first Communist army that opposed the newly united anti-Communist "Western Allies" in the field — as they had begun to call themselves. Because his forces continued to defy the fighter bombers of Britain and South Africa, as well as the armor and artillery of the soldiers of the Athens government, "General Markos" achieved almost legendary status. He was sought after by the press, too — among them, George Polk for the Columbia Broadcasting System and Homer Bigart for *The New York Herald Tribune*. Polk (1913-1948), a decorated US Navy pilot during the war in the Pacific, had arranged with putative Greek Leftists to track Vafiadis from Thessalonika into the mountains in spring 1948. Well regarded as an objective reporter, Polk had filed stories that claimed (right-wing) government officials had embezzled $250,000 of American aid funds — which apparently made him a marked man. He was last seen May 8, 1948 in the

northern Greek port city. Polk's body was discovered eight days later, hands and feet bound, shot in the back of his head, washed up on shore.

Homer Bigart (1907–1992) had already earned two Pulitzer prizes when he arrived in Greece to cover the Civil War. Like George Weller, Bigart knew and liked his younger colleague Polk and they shared disdain for the "official lie" of Washington and Athens on the nature of the Civil War. He had also tried and failed to find a way to get to "General Markos" in northern Greece. After having left messages seeking contact with Leftist sympathizers, Bigart left Athens on his way to Italy, and paused in Belgrade.

There (in my beloved Hotel Moskva), a mysterious Greek emissary appeared on June 13, a month after Polk's murder, and told Bigart he would be escorted back to Greece to meet Markos. Before departing, Bigart wrote to William Polk, younger brother of George, that he was "hoping to get the story your brother went after," and added: "I hope the stories I send will be regarded as a sort of personal memorial to George, who gave his life trying to "get the other side." There followed a harrowing journey by smelly third class carriage to Skopje, onward by truck to the frontier and then on foot and riding horseback or by mule on a wooden saddle, he finally reached the storied Kapetanios (guerrilla commander) on July 1 and got his interview. He wrote four stories — heavily edited back in New York by *The Herald Tribune*. Bigart won the first George Polk Prize for foreign reporting in 1948. (George Weller won that award in 1954.)

Vafiadis was not so fortunate. Less than two months later, Stalin demanded that the Greek Communist Party denounce Tito and the independent path he was pursuing in neighboring Yugoslavia. The party chief, Nikolaos Zachariadis, a would-be Stalinist, complied, but the independent-minded Markos Vafiadis did not. He was cast out of the party of which he had been a member since 1928 and whose army he led.

Accompanied by Dina Kyriakidou, a young journalist serving as my translator, I drove into the hills east of Athens to meet Vafiadis at a modest house belonging to his relatives. We found a vigorous man of eighty, as wiry as he appeared in photographs fifty years earlier. His light blue eyes sparkled when he laughed; he spoke modestly of his adventures and trials.

He recited details of his career not previously revealed — his confinement in Albania where one of his jailers was Mehmet Shehu (the Communist leader who later turned anti-Soviet); his examination by a team of Soviet psychiatrists sent to determine whether his alleged deviation from

the Greek party line was to be explained as mental illness; his confinement in the Urals town of Penza where he became a watchmaker; his marriage to a Russian woman who bore him a son.

When I mentioned Homer Bigart, he smiled and murmured fondly, "Ah, Homeros!" An editor removed that passage from my story. But I retrieved a carbon copy of what I had typed and sent it to Bigart in New Hampshire, where he had retired. He replied that he was "not surprised…. If you saw what *The Herald Tribune* in its great phase of anti-Communism did to my Markos interview you would hardly feel bruised." Bigart also paid me a compliment in discussing my work with Joe Lelyveld, a *New York Times* editor — "Tell him, I envy him his stories." (Bigart was generous to colleagues — when reviewing George Weller's *Crack in the Column*, he wrote in his review in *The Herald Tribune* that the author was "the best informed United States correspondent on Greece.")

This was not the end of the newspaper stories that began with Polk and Bigart. The Markos Vafiadis story in which I described him as "a kind of Odysseus of the political Left" did not include a question I had asked him about the family of reporter Nicholas Gage, born in the northern Greek village of Lia in 1939. After having left *The New York Times* in 1980 after a few years as a reporter, Nick wrote a book, *Eleni*, about his mother, Eleni Gatzoyiannis, who had been executed by the Communist army as a traitor to their cause. Nick Gage's book described the reason had been that Eleni had smuggled four of her five children out of the guerrilla-controlled territory so that they could join their father who had emigrated to the United States. Vafiadis was familiar with the story and when I broached the question, he quietly told me that he had personally intervened to determine whether there was justification for placing her before firing squads. He replied: "I examined the evidence, and there was a lot of it, and concluded that she was guilty of communicating with the government forces, betraying our positions." Ironically, Eleni was executed a few days before General Markos was seized and convicted of betraying his cause!

My story was published October 19, 1986. Twenty-two days later *The New York Times* published a long, agonized letter by Nick Gage. He wrote:

> I was surprised and deeply disturbed to read the unquestioning interview of Markos Vafiadis…. It was astounding to read Mr. Vafiadis being allowed to falsify drastically the history of the Greek civil war without question.… He instituted a program of terror in the villages his army occupied unequaled since the Turks were driven out.… Yet the Communist guerrilla leader behind these atrocities was allowed to express his own version of the causes, course and effects of

> the Greek civil war without challenge…. To compare him to Odysseus is irresponsible....

Since I had chosen not to write about the version of those tragic and painful events related by Markos Vafiadis, I decided not to respond to Nick Gage's letter. (We later had friendly exchanges on other matters.)

I did not return to Greece (except for a vacation on Crete and Rhodes) until February 2003 when I flew to Ioannina, the largest city (pop. 70,000) in Epirus Region. That part of northwestern Greece had been the domain of the Greek Democratic Army and its commander, Markos Vafiadis, but that was not what drew me there. Rather I was invited to be a guest speaker at a conference sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on "Human Trafficking" — a.k.a. sex slavery — touted as the newest high-profile international crime by the United Nations, the United States and other high-minded institutions and states. My topic: "Trends and profits in various kinds of trafficking in the Balkans."

Ah, Jannina! The beautiful city on the shore of Lake Pamvotis, facing a storied island and, beyond, the Pindus mountains whose peaks reach 7,000 feet. It was a remarkable learning center. Indeed, an Epirote scholar, Neophytos Doukas, wrote: "During the eighteenth century every author of the Greek world was either from Ioannina or was a graduate of one of the city's schools." Two of those schools, the Epiphaniou 1647 and the Gioumeios 1676 were founded by Greek merchants with Ioannina connections living in Venice. A third school, the Zosimaia, was founded in 1828 by five Ioannina brothers who became prosperous merchants in Russia. Their high school was attended by a historian friend of mine, Nikolaos Stavrou, who had grown up in an Epirus village and made a career in Washington. I made a point of visiting the Zosimaia to admire its classic façade, an exact replica of University of Athens.

Ioannina was most renowned as the power base — with a population of 35,000 in 1800 — of Ali Pasha Tepelena (1740-1822). The tyrant was born 55 miles to the north in Albania, eventually ruling an Epirus that stretched from southern Albania to northern Greece. He served the Turkish Sultan and enriched himself with the plundered wealth of indigenous Vlachs.… How much more "Balkan" could you be? Even Lord Byron sought him out — in 1809 — and wrote to his mother that "his highness is a remorseless tyrant guilty of the most horrible cruelties." While in Ioannina Byron also began his narrative poem, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Ali, commander of thousands of Albanian janissaries, had been elevated to the rank of Pasha for his contribution in Turkey's 1787 war with Austria. A year later, he seized Ioannina and its surroundings and completed the pillaging of the prosperous Vlach city of Moscopole to the north. After three decades of rule he, grew too bold for the Sultan, whose army besieged his stronghold. In retreat, Ali set the city ablaze with cannonades from his fortified island in Lake Pamvotis. In 1822, the Sultan's troops landed and finally shot him to death through the floor of his retreat in the St. Panteleimon Monastery and sent his head on a silver platter to the Sultan in Istanbul.

As destiny would have it, our human-trafficking conference delegation was invited across the lake to the island to lunch in the very building where Ali Pasha Tepelena was killed. I noticed there were half a dozen heavily made up young women at adjoining tables and went over to ask them where they were from. Two were from Romania, others from Moldova and Bulgaria. To the question (in my pidgin Romanian and Bulgarian) what they were doing there, they replied with the universal noun "Sex!" Returning to the conference delegates' table I declared: "I think we have been meeting in the wrong hall."

In retrospect, Ioannina was not such a bad choice for the human-trafficking meeting. After all, Ali Pasha Tepelena had kept a harem of three hundred women — pretty ones seized in neighboring towns and villages — and three hundred strapping boys in the seraglio to be trained as janissaries. For that matter, Greek myths and Homer's verses were also replete with stories of women having been seized and transported far from their homes. When, a decade later and far from the land of antiquity, I see the blue and white stripes of the Greek flag (adopted in 1822), my thoughts turn to the azure Aegean Sea and the white marble of the Cyclades and I feel reborn.

CODA

"Illyria" may seem odd as a collective designation for the Southeastern European countries in these memoirs. But it is at least as appropriate as the geographic term "Balkan" (which, as noted at the outset, is ill-founded). It emerges from a study begun in 2009 by a genetics researcher of the iGENEA company in Zurich that Illyrian DNA is more prevalent in Balkan populations than many other genetic markers. Thus fully 40 percent of the indigenous peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have Illyrian DNA, but only 15 percent have Slav DNA. While the people of Serbia and Montenegro have 30 percent Slav DNA and 21 percent Illyrian DNA. Albanians, on the other hand, who have boasted of a virtually pure Illyrian origin since Albania became an established state a century ago, have merely 30 percent Illyrian DNA while Slavs make up 20 percent of Albanian DNA, and Hellenic people 14 percent (the rest being, Thracian, Phoenician and Viking). Even Croatia's indigenous peoples have more Illyrian DNA than Albanians. Illyrian DNA is also present in the indigenous peoples of Macedonia and Slovenia, the iGENEA research shows. (In five former Yugoslav republics, scatterings of Celtic, Teuton, Hun, Thracian, Phoenician, Hellenic, Viking, Vandal and Jewish DNA were also identified.) Subsequent DNA research in Balkan countries by the Forensics Medicine Institute of Macedonia came to similar conclusions in 2011.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which included all these peoples, was established December 1, 1918 by the union of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs which was crushed by the Axis powers in 1941. Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was proclaimed in 1943 by the (Communist-led) Yugoslav Partisan resistance movement, renamed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946 and again renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963. It began to disintegrate in June 1991 with the secession — backed by a resurgent united Germany — of Slovenia and Croatia. These secessions won recognition by other European governments as a result of massive pressure by Germany at a European Economic Community meeting of foreign ministers in Maastricht on December 16, 1991. The severely truncated Federal Republic of Yugoslavia succumbed in 2003.

These memoirs deal with a period in the early 1960s when I began reporting on these countries and peoples. They conclude at the end of the 20th century when I ceased traveling and reporting in the region. Following is an attempt to update readers on developments that have taken place over the last twelve years.

SERBIA

When the Yugoslav Communist state began to collapse in the 1990s, Serbia was the lone republic that did not have full control of its territory — Tito having given autonomous status to both the wealthy Vojvodina in the northeast and the impoverished Kosovo in the southwest. As Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006) rose to the top in Serbia's League of Communists, the federal party was beginning to crack up under pressure from centrifugal nationalist forces. Ironically it was his ambition as early as 1987 to preside over a strengthening of central federal power through the Serbian party apparatus.* After asserting Belgrade's authority over Kosovo and Vojvodina, Milošević also dominated Montenegro through handpicked subordinates in Titograd. Although he followed the lead of other republics in introducing a multiple party system in 1990, he controlled almost all media outlets and in spring 1991 blacked out press coverage of mass protests against his rule in downtown Belgrade.

Serbia was only tangentially involved in the Yugoslav civil wars that began in Slovenia in the summer of 1991, spread down into Croatia, and then in 1992 extended to Bosnia-Herzegovina. None of Serbia's towns or cities was directly affected — although Serbian soldiers fought on all fronts first as members of the Yugoslav Peoples Army (JNA) and later of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS).

But Serbia was painfully hurt by the increasing isolation and punitive sanctions imposed by the European Community in 1991 and by the United Nations a year later. These sanctions also caused hyperinflation and economic misery for millions of Serbs. Nevertheless, Milošević remained in power after the four years of wars were ended by the Dayton peace accords. Barred by the constitution from seeking a third term as President of Serbia, he assumed the presidency of the (shrunken) Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) in July 1997.

The newly formed Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës)* gathered strength while Milošević authorized repressive measures against the Albanian majority. The Albanians were already boycotting all Serbian institutions. Civil warfare broke out in 1998, which provoked NATO airstrikes that began on March 24, 1999 and were authorized by President Bill Clinton in order "to protect thousands of innocent people." That same day Milošević was indicted (with American prodding) for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. In the next eleven weeks NATO bombs killed more than **500** people and destroyed

* Starting in 1987, I sought to interview Milošević eleven times, and was always rebuffed. I once shook hands with him, along with several others attending Cyrus Vance's visit to Belgrade in January 1993 in the context of the Geneva conference to negotiate a Yugoslav peace agreement. I viewed him then and later less as a die-hard Serb nationalist and more as dedicated Yugoslav Communist who, like other Serbs of his generation, felt that Serbia, the largest nation and the oldest state in the South Slavic region, had (under Tito) been cheated out of its rightful leading role. He was a very stubborn man devoted to his strong-willed and manipulative wife, Mirjana.

buildings and bridges across Serbia. In the truce that followed, Serbia withdrew all its armed forces from Kosovo and more than 200,000 Serbs fled their ancestral homeland.

Milošević hung on for another year after having decided in 2000 — inexplicably — to run for reelection a year before his mandate expired. He was defeated in the first round on September 24 by the opposition coaltion led by Vojislav Koštunica and, amid demonstrations by half a million in Belgrade, accepted defeat two weeks later. Zoran Đindjić (1952–2003), who was Koštunica's chief rival in the opposition movement, was chosen by Parliament in December to the powerful office of Prime Minister and soon began opposing Koštunica's policies. Among the issues between them was the fate of Milošević, who was under indictment not only by the Hague Tribunal for war crimes but also by a Yugoslav court on charges of "corruption" and "abuse of power." Milošević was jailed in Belgrade March 31, 2001 then secretly extradicted to The Hague three months later on orders from Đindjić — an action Koštunica opposed as against the law. Koštunica served as (the last) President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until February 2003 when the state was renamed Serbia and Montenegro. Đindjić was assassinated a month later by a cabal of security policemen and gangsters. After new elections, Koštunica was chosen Prime Minister in March 2004. His coalition with the rival Democratic Party headed by Boris Tadić collapsed in 2008 mainly over Kostunica's resignation on the ground of insisting that the territorial integrity of Serbia (meaning inclusion of Kosovo) was more important than joining the European Union. Tadić chose the EU over Kosovo as a priority. Dominant power moved from the office of prime minister to that of president and Tadić, who was chosen president in 2004 and reelected in 2008, and has remained dominant in Serbian politics. Serbia formally applied for membership in the EU in 2009. After making concessions on the nature and status of Kosovo, the Belgrade government won candidate status in the continental organization in spring 2012.

KOSOVO and METOHIJA

In 1989, Serbia's President Milošević abolished the considerable degree of autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija had achieved under Tito and his successors. He also authorized dismissals of more than 100,000 ethnic Albanians on the payroll of government institutions and enterprises. Albanian teachers, refusing to teach in the state schools, withdrew from the system. Dominant in numbers — more than 80 percent of the population — Albanians resorted to establishing parallel schools and other institutions. In 1991 following a referendum, the Albanians declared Kosovo and independent state which was duly recognized solely by neighboring Albania. This Kosovo "republic" elected

Ibrahim Rugova president the next year. About this time militants formed the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* — Kosovo Liberation Army, but it did not go into action until 1996 with hit and run attacks on police stations and other government facilities. (The KLA was called a "terrorist" organization by the United States until 1998, when it was tacitly accepted as "legitimate" and thereafter aided and abetted.) Rugova, in contrast to KLA militants, preached and practice a policy of passive resistance. Two years later KLA units grew bolder and, adopting conventional military tactics, seized villages, towns and industrial enterprises. Meanwhile the US and its European allies, acting through the United Nations, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and NATO, were heightening pressure on the Serbian government to conduct policy toward Kosovo with a minimum of violence. The OSCE established a Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission to monitor military movements and in October 1998 the Atlantic alliance began issuing threats of air strikes against Serbian forces. These diplomatic moves encouraged the KLA to intensify its attacks on Serbs in towns and cities in early 1999.

On February 6, 1999 NATO convened a conference on Kosovo at a chateau in Rambouillet, outside Paris, where they demanded that Serbia restore autonomy to Kosovo. Milošević readily acceded to this demand. But when the combined Western powers demanded not merely the stationing of 30,000 NATO troops in Kosovo but also demanded the right of unhindered passage for NATO troops through all of Serbia as well as their immunity from Serbian law, and furthermore demanded authorizing a referendum on independence in Kosovo, then the Belgrade government balked. On March 23 the Serbian government said no. That same day, NATO's secretary general, Javier Solana (of Spain) called NATO headquarters and ordered the bombing of what remained of Yugoslavia.

The bombing by a total of a thousand NATO aircraft lasted 79 days from March 24 to June 11. Estimates of the civilian death toll from the NATO bombing vary widely from "between 488 and 527 Yugoslav civilians" (or, "about 500 civilians") accounted for by Human Rights Watch following on-site investigations, and "at least 1,200" and "as many as 5,000" claimed by the Yugoslav authorities. 462 Yugoslav (Serbian and Montenegrin) servicemen are estimated to have been killed. As the air raids began, some 300,000 Kosovo Albanian civilians trekked or were transported southward across frontiers to refugees camps in Macedonia and Albania (followed by what was estimated by the UN to be another 500,000 in April). Following mediation by Finnish and Russian intermediaries, President Milošević accepted NATO demands to station its troops in Kosovo after

the removal of Serbian forces. NATO members touted their operation as the alliance's first "humanitarian war."

The territory was initially occupied by 50,000 NATO troops (reduced in stages to 5,790 by February 2012). The KLA was disbanded, many of its members enrolling in the Kosovo Police Force. The UN established an interim administration called UNMIK, nearly all of whose functions were filled in December 2008 by the European Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). Meanwhile, members of the Kosovo Assembly (parliament) declared Kosovo's independence as the *Republic of Kosovo*. All of this transpired under Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council. Pressed by the United States and other NATO powers, recognition by foreign governments swiftly grew — amounting to 90 by early 2012 — although five European Union members withheld endorsement.

More than 200,000 Serbs, Roma (Gypsies) and other minorities fled Kosovo after the NATO bombardment ended. Those who remained lived to a large degree under siege by the Albanian majority. Many of their properties were looted or destroyed. In March 2004, Albanians went on rampages throughout Kosovo desecrating or destroying 35 Serbian churches, 935 houses, and numerous schools, health clinics and other structures. Serb citizens were driven from six towns and nine villages.

The main political parties of the new republic were the Democratic League of Kosovo, which was created by Ibrahim Rugova (who died in 2006) and two groups that emerged from the KLA — the Democratic Party led by Hashim Thaci and the Alliance for the Future led by Ramush Haradinaj, who faced charges at The Hague war crimes court for eight years.

Economically, Kosovo remains the basket case that it had been as part of Yugoslavia. It imports more than 90 percent of its consumer goods. Foreign assistance accounts for 34 percent of gross domestic product and another 13 percent from remittances by Kosovo Albanians living abroad. Industry is feeble, unemployment is above 40 percent and production of power is spotty.

BOSNIA and HERCEGOVINA

In October 1991, Bosnian Moslems and Croats, who then constituted respectively 43 percent and 17 percent of the population of 4.3 million, voted to secede from the crumbling Yugoslavia. Serbs refused to participate in the referendum. A few months later Alija Izetbegović, leader of the republic's Moslems demanded that Belgrade, representing the remainder of Yugoslavia, recognize HIS Bosnia's independence, meaning the realization of his lifelong dream — a Moslem-dominated Bosnia. For that matter, his dream, articulated in his 1973 Islamic Declaration, embodied the

thinking of his family (his name ending in "beg" (i.e., *bey*) meant he was a Moslem of noble extraction) and friends. When that failed, he turned to American and Western European leaders for support, which he obtained piece by piece while rejecting all efforts by the European Community to negotiate a settlement. Meanwhile, Bosnian Croats proclaimed a Croatian Republic and lastly, the Bosnian Serbs led by Radovan Karadžić, a psychiatrist, Nikola Koljević, a professor of English and Momčilo Krajišnik, a politician, rallied to create their own entity, the Republika Srpska. While there had already been sporadic shooting and killing in March 1992, full-scale ethnic strife broke out when the parliament in Sarajevo declared independence on April 5 and was swiftly accorded international recognition. In a few days, each ethnic group fielded hastily organized fighting forces (the Serbs of the Yugoslav Peoples Army being transformed into Republika Srpska units) and vicious clashes ensued. In May, Serbian forces began besieging Sarajevo. Moslem forces had great difficulty breaching the blockade. But of the nearly 13,756 Sarajevans killed in the next three years, some 2,000 were Serbs.

(Wild overstatements which were widely believed in the Western capitals, figured in the Moslem narrative. Thus, already in 1993, Bosnian officials were claiming 20,000 to 55,000 women had been raped by Serbian soldiers (although no evidence was offered). As early as December 1992, Sarajevo government officials were also exaggerating death tolls. Foreign Minister Haris Silajdžić said at that time that Bosnia's dead already totaled 128,444. Six months later Senada Kreso, Minister of Information, announced that "200,000 had died." In February 2012, the Research and Documentation Center of Bosnia-Herzegovina issued its definitive finding that a total of 98,000 had been killed on all sides in the Bosnian fighting that ended in autumn 1995 — 63,000 of them Bosnians. Its director Mirsad Tokača (a Moslem) said 55 percent of the 98,000 were soldiers and the rest civilians.)

Altogether, four peace plans were offered by international mediators during the Bosnian War. The first called the Carrington-Cutilleiro Plan was named for Lord Peter Carrington of Britain and Ambassador Jose Cutilleiro of Portugal of the European Community. Essentially proposing power-sharing among the ethnic groups on all administrative levels, it was initially signed by the warring parties March 18, 1992. Ten days later, Izetbegović withdrew his signature. In January 1993, Cyrus Vance for the United Nations and Lord Owen for the EC unveiled their plan for dividing the republic into ten semi-autonomous regions. The Bosnian Serb assembly rejected the plan, effectively killing it. Vance resigned. Negotiations were revived in July 1993 by Owen and Norway's Thorvald Stoltenberg for the U.N. But this time the Bosnian Moslems rejected their plan at the end of August.

Between February and October 1994, the "Contact Group" of France, the U.S., Britain, Russia and Germany tried and failed to negotiate a settlement.

In March 1994, under pressure from the United States, Izetbegović's Moslems and Mate Boban's Croats agreed to form a (joint) Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croats and Moslems had fought bloodily over Mostar, Travnik and other sites where the two ethnic groups lived. At that time, about 70 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina were controlled by forces of the Republika Srpska. The United States had already begun secretly to assist Bosnian forces by allowing Arab governments to fly arms and volunteer fighters to the Bosnian Moslems, and the U.S. would soon begin aiding the Croatian military as well. Now with U.S. prodding, NATO began to intervene directly in the fighting, with American F-16s shooting down four Serbian warplanes on February 28 and air strikes on Serbian forces outside Goražde on April 22. A year later, NATO planes attacked Serbian forces again and the Serbs took U.N. peacekeepers hostage. The internationalization of the conflict continued to grow into the summer as French troops shelled Serbian positions outside of Sarajevo. On July 11, Serbian forces overran the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia. Several thousand Moslem males were killed in the ensuing days (Moslems claimed "8,000 men and boys" were killed — the Serbs said that number was greatly exaggerated). At the end of August, NATO planes struck Serbian gun positions around Sarajevo, forcing their withdrawal. On September 8, Serbian and Moslem leaders agreed to stop fighting and seek a territorial division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The outlines of a peace plan were agreed upon three weeks later, paving the way for peace talks in Dayton, Ohio. In December 1995, leaders of the warring factions signed a peace agreement granting 51 percent of the territory to the Moslem and Croat side and 49 percent to the Serbs.

The reality of post-Dayton has been a political impasse in which the Republika Srpska has been relatively successful in developing its economy — separate from the rest of Bosnia — under President Milorad Dodik. Meanwhile, the Moslem-Croat part has for the most part been mired in political infighting among various Moslem factions and Croat-Moslem disagreements. Part of the Moslem leadership remains bent on the Islamization of all of Bosnia. Surprisingly some of the post-Dayton stipulations of the occupying powers such as a unitary military, seem to have worked. The return of more than half of the two million or so refugees created by the war was reported by the UN in 2004.

MACEDONIA

Emerging from the collapse of Federal Yugoslavia, Macedonia declared itself an independent republic in 1991. It was born with a restive Albanian minority (at least 20 percent of the 2 million population) and an innate problem with Greece which claims the very name Macedonia belongs to Greeks. (Athens continued to call its northern neighbor the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" — FYROM in official usage.) A brief armed uprising by Albanians in Macedonia's western region bordering Albania in 2001 ended with intervention by a NATO peacekeeping force and the granting of greater autonomy to the minority.

Kiro Gligorov, who had headed Macedonia in its last Yugoslav days, remained president and, surviving an assassination attempt in 1995, served eight years. He was succeeded by Boris Trajkovski. Meanwhile the government headed by Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski, a Social Democrat, remained in office until 1998. New elections carried Ljubco Georgievski of the VRMO party (named for the revolutionary organization formed at the beginning of century) to power. Elections in 2002 brought Crvenkovski back to office, then President Trajkovski was killed in a plane crash in 2004. Crvenkovski ran for and won the presidency. A former defense minister, Vlado Bučkovski, was chosen Prime Minister. Elections in 2006 hoisted another VMRO candidate, Nikola Gruevski, into that office. A VMRO colleague, Gjorge Ivanov, was chosen president in 2009.

The rule of Macedonia by VMRO leaders meant that the policy of asserting Macedonian nationalism in confrontation with Greece would continue with symbols offensive to Greeks erected right and left: a huge statue of (the Greek) Alexander the Great erected in the capital Skopje; the main Macedonian airport named after Alexander; the national flag with a symbolic rising sun adapted from the original Greek region of Macedon and on and on. As a result, Macedonia was registered at the United Nations as FYROM in 1993, was briefly subjected to a trade embargo by Greece in 1994, was prevented from obtaining full membership in NATO, and was kept from advancing beyond candidate status in the European Union. Despite all these problems, Macedonia managed to increase its GDP by 5.2 percent in the first half of 2011.

VLACHS

The main change in the situation of Vlachs in the region during the last dozen years appears to be that they are hiding their identity less than in the past and have formed public associations. In part inspired by Vlach activists in the United States and Western Europe, these associations have been formed in Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania. Previously, singling out Vlachs had been made difficult by "their chameleon-like characteristics," according to Irina Nicolau (1946–

2002), a Romanian scholar. While a German researcher in Greece, Theda Kahl, wrote of Vlachs as "a minority behaving like a majority," adding that "their economic superiority even prevented them from developing their own nationality and accelerated their national absorption." Before he died aged 94 in 2012, Kiro Gligorov, President of Macedonia in the 1990s, was disclosed to have Vlach ancestors.

Vlachs in Macedonia founded two political parties and Vlach newspapers and magazines are published; Vlach television and radio programs are broadcast. The census lists about 10,000 Vlachs in Macedonia although Kahl thinks there are more than twice that number.

Albanian Vlachs formed an Aromanians of Albania association as well as a Council of Aromanians. In 2010, the Council sponsored a meeting of several thousand Vlachs from various countries in the ancient Vlach town of Moschopolis in eastern Albania. Meanwhile, the Albanian Academy of Sciences established that there were 139,065 Vlachs living in the country — making them the country's second largest population group.

Greek Vlachs had been traditionally ambivalent — or at least reticent — about their identity, a stance made evident by a comment of the mayor of a large Vlach village: "How is it possible that someone calls us a minority? We made the Greek state!" But in the 1980s various Vlach societies were organized and in 1985 they joined to form the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Vlach Cultural Associations. Thede Kahl estimates there are at most 300,000 Vlachs in Greece, of whom one-third are fluent in Aromanian.

Vlachs in Romania remain divided on issues of identity. A request by one Aromanian group in 2005 to the government in Bucharest to accord recognition to the Vlach minority caused what one observer called "a civil war" among Vlachs. These differences were, if anything, accentuated in 1998 by an eminent historian, Alexandru D. Xenopol, who wrote that Vlachs spoke a language that was "Romanic not Romanian." Xenopol also wrote "Daco-Romanians (i.e. Dacian) and Macedo-Romanians (i.e. Macedonian) are two very different peoples by their origin. They resemble each other very much because they are a mix of the same elements."[*]

Serbia has about 40,000 declared Vlachs and a total of 55,000 citizens who claim Vlach as their mother tongue. They have quite active civic associations which promote Vlach cultural events.

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[*] Much of the forgoing material is drawn from the research of Alexandru Gica in his article, "Recent History of the Aromanians in Southeast Europe," in *Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul*. Vol. XXIV.

There are few recorded studies of Vlach DNA – the only comment recorded (online) saying: "Vlach DNA doesn't indicate origin other than that some Greek, some Slav, some Illyrian ancestors appear."

SLOVENIA

Milan Kučan proclaimed Slovenia an independent country on June 27, 1991 and immediately Slovenian soldiers manning borders switched the insignias on the Yugoslav Peoples Army uniforms they were wearing. The "newly minted" Slovene forces immediately shot down two Yugoslav aircraft and attacked ground units around army barracks and at the main airport. Over the next ten days, Slovenian forces killed 44 Yugoslav soldiers and 12 foreign nationals, including truck drivers and journalists, while incurring 18 dead on their side. Then the federal forces were withdrawn from the new republic.

In November, a new constitution was proclaimed and in January 1992 the European Union accorded recognition of the new republic. Janez Drnovsek, who had previously held the highest posts in the Yugoslav Communist system, served as Slovenia's prime minister for ten years until 2002, while Kučan served through the same period as president — both representing the party called Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. Elections in 2004 were won by a right wing coalition led by Janez Jansa (1958–), whose father had fought in the pro-Nazi Home Guard during World War II. Janez was convicted in 1988 of military espionage and his imprisonment served as a rallying point for the national independence movement. He served briefly as Defense Minister in the first Drnovsek administration but was dismissed two years later in a scandal involving espionage. Much later, it was disclosed that he had participated in reselling and smuggling huge amounts of arms that had been stashed in Slovenia during its "Yugoslav" years to neighboring Croatian and Bosnian Moslem armies during their struggles with Serbian forces.

Jansa stormed back at the head of his Slovenian Democratic Party in the 2004 elections and was chosen Prime Minister. But Slovenia's reputation was marred outside the country by government acts to erase the citizenship of thousands of residents who came from other former Yugoslav republics, as well as by the border dispute with Croatia which was backed by Jansa. Both issues were eventually settled. But Jansa was narrowly defeated in a Social Democrat comeback in 2008 under Borut Pahor, but the ensuing world financial crisis at the end of the decade (Slovenian GDP fell 7.3 percent) enabled Jansa to make a comeback heading a fragile coalition in 2012.

CROATIA

Croatia's rocky road to independence began well before its declaration of independence in October 1991, paved as it was by extremely vocal and ever more violent Croatian nationalists in the 1970s and 1980s. Among them were a series of terrorist actions that included killings of Yugoslavs in Germany and Sweden, the downing of a JAT airliner that killed 26, the death of a New York policeman from a bomb placed in a public locker at Grand Central Station, and the detonation a bomb in the Statue of Liberty.

In 1989, as Yugoslavia lurched toward dissolution, the Communist Party allowed other political parties to form. With backing and money from Diaspora Croats, Franjo Tuđman, a onetime army general who pursued a career as a historian, founded the Croatian Democratic Union. In the first contested national elections held later that year, Tuđman was overwhelmingly chosen Croatia's president, In May 1991, his Croatia held a referendum on independence which 94 percent of the electorate endorsed. Independence was declared June 25.

The already mobilized Yugoslav Peoples Army (JNA), whose officers were nearly three-fifths Serbs, controlled somewhat less than one-third of Croatia's territory. It was concentrated in regions where Croatia's Serbian minority — constituting about 12 percent of the population of 4.5 million — predominated. From the summer of 1991 on to mid-1995, Croatia engaged in a bizarre on-again off-again war. Initially, the JNA strategy was largely confined to artillery barrages against Croatian cities — Dubrovnik, Gospić, Šibenik, Zadar, Osijek, Vukovar and others. But in some, Serbian-led armored units were deployed. In Vukovar, at least 1,800 civilians (Croatian and Serbian) were killed. The Serbian siege of 87 days ended November 18 when the Croatian forces surrendered. Croatian forces later recaptured some 500 square miles of territory before a ceasefire was arranged by former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in January 1992. Croatia was then officially recognized by the European Community.

Meanwhile, the Krajina region — arching over the northern and western edges of Bosnia, encompassing more than one-quarter of the Croatian republic, and inhabited largely by Serbs — had declared itself sovereign and independent. Some 80,000 Croats were driven out. In February 1992, further chunks of Serbian-majority territory — pieces of Slavonia, Baranja and Srem were added to the Republic of Serbian Krajina. Thanks to the ceasefire and the stationing of a U.N. "Protection Force," the region remained peaceful for the next three years, although Serbian forces used a western corner of Krajina to shell the town of Bihać just across the frontier in a Moslem-held sector of

Bosnia. In September 1994, the Tuđman government hired the American company, Military Professional Resources, Inc. (formed by retired Pentagon officers) to train Croatian officers. Seven months later, Croatian forces smashed into Slavonia in an operation dubbed "Flash" and retook it. Then in early August, aided by U.S. Air Force strikes on Serbian missile installations, Croatia retook Krajina and forced at least 200,000 Serbs to flee. About 700 Serbs were killed. Territories in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium that remained under U.N. guardianship returned to Croatia in the course of the following three years. Wide areas of the republic had been devastated. It was forced to harbor not only internal refugees but 700,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Franjo Tuđman remained in power until his death in 1999, despite losing popularity because of corruption, widespread unemployment and poor economic policy. Attempts to enter the European Union were delayed by the failure to arrest Gen. Ante Gotovina, the country's leading war crimes suspect until 2005 (he was convicted in 2011). Elections in 2000 brought more moderate politicians to power. A remaining border dispute with Slovenia was settled in 2009 and opened the way for accession to the EU, which is now expected in 2013.

BULGARIA

The Bulgarian Communist Party, which had ruled the country since 1946, relinquished much of its power in November 1989 (along with most of the other Communist parties in Eastern Europe). But a group of party moderates who formed the new Bulgarian Socialist Party won the first contested elections in June 1990. A new constitution was adopted in 1991. The economy receded amid strikes and living standards plummeted for most of the next decade. Todor Zhivkov (1911–1998), who had ruled longer than any other European Communist politician, was arrested — not for any political crimes (hundreds of his prisoners had been killed) but on charges of nepotism and fraud. Convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to seven years, Zhivkov was allowed to serve his term under house arrest and was finally acquitted. In a turn of fate, three years after Zhivkov's death, Bulgaria's ex-regent, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, won election as Prime Minister. Simeon had spent most of his life in exile in Egypt and Spain. He continued to claim his royal title as Tsar of Bulgaria. At the same time Georgi Parvanov, a historian of the Communist Party who had become chairman of the (renamed) Socialist Party, was chosen President. Simeon was succeeded in 2005 by Sergei Stanishev of the Socialist Party, another historian who had studied in Moscow. In 2006 Parvanov was reelected. During his tenure, Bulgaria was admitted to NATO (2004) and the European Union (2007). Meanwhile, Boyko Borissov, the former mayor of Sofia who had been a

high-ranking officer in state security, was elected prime minister. In October 2011, Rosen Plevneliev, the outgoing minister of construction, was elected president. Both Plevneliev and Borissov represent the center-right GERB Party (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria).

ROMANIA

After the overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989 (under still murky circumstances), a hastily assembled successor government calling itself the National Salvation Front seized power. It was led by Ion Iliescu (1930–) who previously served in various party and government posts and had been perceived as a rival by Ceausescu and relegated to the provinces. The NSF called for elections which were held in May 1990. Iliescu handily won the election, gaining close to 70 percent, despite protests that verged on violence. In 1992 he ran again under Romania's new constitution and won 61 percent. Meanwhile, the NSF fell apart and several parties emerged, including the Social Democratic Party, which formed several coalitions while Iliescu remained head of state for six years. An opposition leader, Emil Constantinescu, was elected in 1996, but after his lackluster performance, the Social Democrats returned to power in 2000 and Iliescu was chosen president again. During the next decade the country experienced rapid growth of the economy.

Meanwhile, Bucharest had applied for membership in the European Union and NATO. Entry into the military alliance proved easier and Romania joined the Atlantic alliance in 2004. Its accession agreement with the EU was approved that same year and in 2007 Romania became a full member. But the economic hardships induced by the transition from the Communist system caused some two million impoverished citizens to seek a better life in Western European and, given the linguistic relationship, the emigrants tended to concentrate in countries of Latin origin such as Italy, Spain and France.

In 2004 Traian Basescu (1951–), a former high seas ship captain who turned to politics after 1989, ran for president at the head of coalition called the Justice and Truth Alliance. He triumphed in the polls (like Iliescu, he had also been a member of the Communist Party). Romania joined NATO and acceded to the European Union that same year and became a full EU member in 2007. In these years a high economic growth rate continued. But Basescu was only narrowly reelected in 2009 as Romania began to struggle with the global economic downturn. Despite heavy borrowing from the International Monetary Fund and massive government spending cuts, the economy continued to decline. Romania was rated as the second poorest country in the EU. In January 2012 massive

protest rallies nearly paralyzed the capital and other cities. Prime Minister Emil Boc was compelled to resign and an interim government was appointed pending elections in the autumn.

ALBANIA

Albania's President Ramiz Alia presided over the disintegration of the Communist state erected by his predecessor, Enver Hoxha (1908–1985). In March 1991, Alia's Party of Labor of Albania (*Partia e Punes e Shqiperise*) won the first — contested — elections in more than four decades. His opponent was the newly formed Democratic Party's Dr. Sali Berisha (1944–), a heart surgeon who had been a member of the medical team attending Hoxha before his death. Alia (1925–2011) was soon compelled to resign amid a collapsing economy, riots convulsing the cities, and thousands fleeing to neighboring countries. The next election in April 1992 and the following one in May 1996 were won by the mindlessly ambitious Berisha. His 1996 election was marred by widespread vote fraud and the violent repression of opposition parties. A few months later, several Ponzi schemes, in which Albanians had invested $1 billion, collapsed. Riots ensued and in March 1997 looters descended on military depots. Again many thousands fled Albania. With the country on the brink of civil war, NATO troops intervened. An extraordinary election was held in June 1997 and Berisha lost to a Socialist-led coalition. Socialist prime ministers governed until the 2005 parliamentary election which Berisha narrowly won. He again barely won reelection in 2009 and remains in power. On Berisha's initiative, Albania had joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. It applied in 2003 to join the European Union and it became a member of NATO in 2009. Much of what transpired in Albania in these years occurred with active engagement of the United States, which inspired the following (Albanian) riddle:

> Why is the United States of America the only democratic country on earth? Because it is the only country on earth without an American embassy.

HUNGARY

The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party gave up its political monopoly in October 1989 by allowing Parliament to call elections and rename the country the Republic of Hungary. The center-right Hungarian Democratic Forum won the May 1990 elections on a platform calling for an orderly transition to capitalism. Soviet occupation troops left Hungary a year later.

Living standards declined as state subsidies were cancelled and a severe recession began. In the May 1994 elections the Socialist Party, led by former Communists, won a resounding parliamentary majority. Four years later, an increase in crime and incidents of government corruption caused voters

switched to a right-leaning coalition led by *Fidesz* (acronym for Alliance of Young Democrats) headed by Viktor Orban, aged 35. He agitated neighboring Romania and Slovakia by demanding more rights for their Hungarian minorities (which had been dominant in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). In 1999 Hungary was admitted to NATO. Orban lost in the 2002 elections and was succeeded by a Socialist-Free Democrat coalition that chose Peter Medgyessy as Prime Minister. His government called a national referendum on the nation's pro-Europe policies and 85 percent of the electorate approved joining the European Union. Hungary acceded a year later. Medgyessy resigned in 2004 and was replaced by Ference Gyurcsany, who was reelected in 2009. The world economic crisis strongly affected Hungary's politics and parliamentary elections and in 2010 brought a return to power of Viktor Orban's nationalist *Fidesz* with a two-thirds majority. Orban translated his victory into a series of repressive measures such as closing Hungary's sole independent radio station (Klubradio) in 2011 and severely censoring newspapers. The situation of Hungary's more than 700,000 Roma (formerly known as Gypsies, an appellation now regarded as pejorative) has worsened with right-wing attacks against the minority. Orban has countered criticism of his policies by the EU's European Commission by organizing mass demonstrations. Gyorgy Konrad, a Hungarian author, commented in 2012: "I have been the satisfied witness of the fall of two authoritarian regimes, fascism and communism. And the end of the third is in sight. Since it is built on falsehoods its fall will be less than graceful."

MONTENEGRO

In a 1992 referendum following the breakup of Yugoslavia, nearly 96 percent of Montenegro's voters chose to remain allied with Serbia in a smaller Federal Republic of Yugoslavia — though minorities of Albanians, Roman Catholics, and others stayed away from the polls. The capital of Podgorica — named Titograd in 1946, got its historic name back. Some Montenegrin troops participated along with Serbian forces in the 1991–1995 fighting in Croatia and Bosnia. In 1996, Prime Minister Milo Đukanović broke ties with the Milošević government in Belgrade and developed an independent economic policy. In 2006, the Đukanović government organized a referendum on total independence and 230,661 — 55 percent — of the electorate approved (but significantly barring the 267,000 people in Serbia with Montenegrin citizenship from voting). The Podgorica government was quickly recognized by the United Nations and its applications for membership in the European Union and NATO were swiftly accepted. But relations with Serbia remained strained. Since becoming fully independent, the Montenegrin economy has made some

progress with modest GDP growth and inflation hovering around 3 percent, But the country's biggest enterprise, the Podgorica Aluminum Plant, has been very troubled.

Đukanović had been elected in 1991 and was reelected in 1993 and 1996, then chosen president in 1998, resuming the premiership in 2003, and returning for a fifth term in 2008. He stepped down in 2010 but remained the principal actor on Montenegro's political stage. Italian and other international authorities began investigating Đukanović in the 1990s as a principal in the billion dollar Mediterranean tobacco smuggling racket in the mid-1990s. But he successfully claimed that as a head of government he was immune from prosecution and in 2009 Italian courts dropped the case.

GREECE

After the long (1967–1974) night imposed by army colonels who had seized power in Athens, Greece experienced some sunny says under Constantine Caramanlis, who was welcomed back from exile in 1974. That same year another exile, Andreas Papandreou, returned and formed a new party, the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Union (PASOK), which resoundingly won elections in 1981. That year Greece joined the European Union. Caramanlis resigned in 1985 when the PASOK-dominated parliament endorsed plans to reduce the powers of the presidency. Meanwhile, Papandreou began an ambitious program to redistribute wealth and provide lifetime jobs to government employees. In 1990, the right-wing New Democracy was able to oust PASOK and choose Constantine Mitsotakis as Prime Minister. He lasted until 1993 when PASOK again won elections and returned Papandreou to power. In 1996, as his heart disease worsened, he resigned and soon died.

Modern Greek politics has been described as "dynastic" and indeed the frequency with which a few family names kept cropping up suggests that description. The father of Andreas Papandreou, Georgios, had been prime minister just after the war and again in the 1960s, and his son, George, was prime minister at the height of Greece's debt crises. Costas Caramanlis, a nephew of President Caramanlis served as a New Democracy prime minister from 2004 to 2009. Dora Bakoyannis, the daughter of Prime Minister Mitsotakis, served during that period as Foreign Minister, while a son, Kyriakos, is a member of parliament.

The starkly opposed philosophies of the leftist PASOK and the rightist New Democracy put the eleven million Greeks on a seesaw — now tipping to massive concessions to workers, now tipping to bounteous privileges for the well-off. The effects on the economy were disastrous as the population swerved between increasingly violent strikes and crippling inflation. There were huge strikes in March 2004, December 2005, March 2006 and December 2008. Prime Minister

Caramanlis called snap elections in December 2009 and was defeated by PASOK's George Papandreou. It was revealed that the Caramanlis government had allowed crooked property deals valued in the billions, falsified financial data submitted to the EU and had given cushy jobs to dozens of relatives. Greece was plunging into an abyss ever faster. Industrial production sank 8 percent in one year. Unemployment nearly tripled from 7.2 percent to 20.9 in the three years leading up to 2011, despite the fact that Greek workers put in more hours than any other European people: 1,900 hours a year. More than one million became jobless.

In early 2010, Papandreou announced pay cuts for government workers followed by tax increases, which prompted massive new strikes. The EU demanded still more austerity measures. As the crisis worsened, European leaders agreed on a bailout program in July 2011, which Papandreou answered with a call for a national referendum. When this provoked massive resistance, he resigned. A national unity government was formed under Lucas Papademos, former head of the national bank, as its head. Amid violent street protests in which dozens of buildings were burned, Parliament adopted very harsh new austerity measures.

* * *

There were six countries in the territory I had covered as a newspaper correspondent: Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Albania. Now there are twelve in that same territory — with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, plus the partially recognized Kosovo, all carved out of the now-vanished Yugoslavia. In 1991, some of us mourned the collapse of that Yugoslavia where our children had been conceived (two in my case), and whose songs we sang, whose *kolo*s we danced, whose novels we read, whose radio programs we heard, whose *rakija* we drank and in whose waters we swam. Communist as the system was, sometimes cruel and often foolishly self-destructive, we had come to see the Yugoslav experiment as a version of the American way — a crazy quilt of nationalities — fiercely independent, with equal rights for all citizens. In our time, nearly two million citizens — one in ten — listed their nationality as "Yugoslav" and the number of mixed marriages was growing — except in Kosovo. But we knew the South Slav federation was "very fragile" — as Josip Broz Tito himself had confided early in his reign to Western diplomats. We knew it could fall apart. We (among others to be included in this "we" are Emile Guikovaty (1920–2001) of Agence France Presse, author of a good biography, *Tito* (1979); Walter R. Roberts of United States Information Agency author of *Tito, Mihailovic and the*

Allies (1973) — the standard account of a controversial subject; Ambassador Larry Eagleburger (1930–2011) of the State Department; Desa Trevisan of *The Times of London*; the artist Olja Ivanjicki (1931–2009); Dennison Rusinow (1930–2004) of the Institute of Current World Affairs and others — mentioned in the various chapters — who enriched my life and work in that Yugoslavia) just did not want it to fall apart.